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An analysis of the relationship between large school districts and the press in California

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
LARGE SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE PRESS
IN CALIFORNIA

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty of
the University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Linda Kay Wark
July 1984

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
LARGE SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE PRESS IN CALIFORNIA

Abstract of Dissertation

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to clarify and analyze the relationship between large school districts and the press in California.

Procedures: Two similar surveys were developed for this study, one for superintendents and public information officers and one for editors and education reporters. The educators' survey had twenty-one items and the journalists' survey twenty-three items. A number of the items were on both surveys. The educators' survey was sent to the superintendent and public information officer of California school districts with over ten thousand average daily attendance (ADA); the journalists' survey was sent to the editor and the education reporter of the newspaper in the city in which the school district is located. The literature review and interviews with educators and journalists formed the basis for survey development.

Findings: (1) Fifty-nine percent of the districts have a specific public information/press policy; 69% of the districts have a public information officer; 67% of the districts have specific procedures for working with the press. (2) Significant differences in perception exist between educators and journalists about the public information/press practices districts employ. (3) Superintendents and public information officers appear to be relatively satisfied with the treatment their districts receive by the press. (4) Educators and journalists do not agree about the role of the press in public education. (5) Journalists characterize districts' public information efforts as moderately successful. (6) More educators than journalists believe their working relationship can be harmonious. (7) Educators cite aggressive reporters and the press' interest in the sensational as factors which hurt their working relationship; journalists, however, cite uncooperative administrators and lack of candor.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Headlines and news stories which portray education in a sensational or seemingly negative aspect occur with increasing frequency in today's newspapers. Typical stories deal with racial violence at a football game, parent protest over closing a neighborhood school, firing of a superintendent, teachers' strikes, drug arrests on campus, or low test scores. Education is apparently news. Education is not only the subject of news stories; it is also the subject of public opinion polls. The September 1982 issue of Phi Delta Kappan, which released the 1982 Gallup Poll of the public's attitude toward the public schools, indicated that only slightly more than one-third of the public gave public schools a high rating.¹

Educators and members of boards of education seem to react emotionally to news stories and polls which they perceive as portraying them or education in a negative aspect. They may accuse journalists of being interested in only the sensational and of being one-sided and inaccurate. As a result of negative coverage, educators often react in various ways: they refuse to talk to reporters; they issue press releases; and they respond publicly and emotionally.

¹George H. Gallup, "Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, 64, No. 1 (September 1982), p. 39.

Seemingly, educators simply react to negative or sensational media coverage without stopping to analyze the reasons why the coverage was negative or how their relations with the newspaper people could be improved. When the negative coverage occurs again, the scenario is repeated. The relationship between the press and school districts is often a precarious, adversarial one.

The relationship between public institutions and the press is frequently controversial. Fred M. Hechinger, education writer for the New York Times, maintains that, "Controversy . . . is a vital part of the news; but educational institutions (like all organized establishments) cherish the absence of controversy."² The reporter's duty mandates that he bring to light facts, unpleasant or not; the educator, on the other hand, feels that negative facts should remain within "the institutional family."³ Thus, differing goals of the educator and the reporter produce controversy.

The relationship between tax-supported public institutions, such as school districts, and the press is not only controversial, but also adversarial. Every government official, board and agency, be these large or small, has a job to do such as passing laws, developing policies and regulations, and dispersing tax dollars. The reporter also has a job, which is to inform the public about every government action.⁴ Frequently the jobs come into conflict and an adversarial

²Gloria Dapper, Public Relations for Educators, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), iii.

³Ibid.

⁴Peter M. Sandman, David M. Rubin and David B. Sachsman, Media: An Introductory Analysis of American Mass Communications (2nd ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 372-373.

position exists. If the reporter consistently complies with the wishes of any government official, he is abdicating his responsibility to the public.⁵ In short, the good reporter is in an adversarial position to public institutions.

The adversarial position of the reporter to public institutions is a necessity in a democracy. The media must have "freedom to know, freedom to tell, freedom to find out."⁶ This freedom was deemed necessary early in democratic history. Patrick Henry said, "The press must prevent officials from 'covering with the veil of secrecy the common routine of business, for the liberties of the people never were, or never will be secure when the transgressions of their rulers may be concealed from them.'"⁷ Thus, the school district, which is a public institution supported by public tax dollars and subject to public scrutiny, and the local education reporter, whose job it is to bring to light facts about public institutions, are in an adversarial position.

However, this adversarial position need not mandate hostility and lack of cooperation between school districts and the press. Frederick concludes that, "more fruitful relations can be developed . . . by broader understanding of the school by the press and of the press by the school."⁸ He suggests that both institutions need

⁵Ibid.

⁶William L. Rivers and Wilbur Schramm, Responsibility in Mass Communications (revised ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 54

⁷Ibid.

⁸Howard Russell Frederick, "Practices and Views of School Superintendents and Newspaper Editors Relative to School News and Communication Programs" (Doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1966), p. 117.

to understand each other better than they apparently do. Wichita editor and publisher John Colburn states that, "It is essential to cultivate a better understanding and a closer association between educators and the press."⁹ Both Frederick and Colburn indicate a critical need for a better understanding between the two institutions. In a study of editors and school administrators in New England, Gross concludes that, "there is no inherent reason why the press and the schools need to be incompatible in their relationship."¹⁰ The literature thus suggests that even though the press and the schools are in an adversarial position, a need exists for understanding of, and cooperation between, the two institutions.

The Problem

This study addressed the problem of the relationship between the press and large school districts in California. Some of the literature suggests that the two institutions are of necessity in an adversarial position; however, the literature also suggests that this adversarial position does not necessarily mandate an acrimonious relationship between the two institutions.

⁹John H. Colburn, "The Responsibility of the Press," Theory into Practice, III, No. 4 (October 1964), p. 122.

¹⁰Neal Gross, The Schools and the Press: A Study of the Relationship Between Newspapermen and School Administrators in New England, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: New England School Development Council, 1956), p. 49.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to try to clarify and analyze the nature of the relationship which currently exists between school districts and the press. In an attempt to provide this clarification and analysis, this study had the following objectives:

1. Determine the frequency with which districts have adopted specific public information policies and procedures
2. Identify the districts' public information practices
3. Identify the superintendent's and public information officer's perceptions of how the district is treated by the press
4. Identify superintendents' and public information officers' and editors' and education reporters' perceptions of the press' role in public education
5. Evaluate, as perceived by the press, school districts' public information efforts
6. Identify superintendents' and public information officers' and editors' and education reporters' perceptions of their working relationship.

Significance of the Study

The 1982 Gallup Poll seems to indicate that the public's image of public schools needs improvement; therefore, the school district administrator needs to strive to improve this image by improving his working relationship with the press. This study provides school district administrators with data about the working relationship between school districts and the press. It adds to the body of knowledge related to district/press relationships and perhaps provides

a basis for further research. It provides suggestions to the administrator who wants to improve his press relationships and perhaps his press coverage. Finally, the study also provides press representatives with suggestions for enhancing their working relationships with school districts.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Editor: The person responsible for directing or supervising the policies and/or preparation of a newspaper

Education Writer: The writer responsible for covering education news on a newspaper

Large School District: A district having over 10,000 average daily attendance (ADA)

Public Information Officer (PIO): The person responsible for liaison with the public, including newspapers; usually reports directly to the superintendent

Superintendent: The chief administrative officer of a school district

Limitations

The study was limited to analyzing the press/school district relationships in all large (over 10,000 average daily attendance) California school districts. (School districts in Sacramento County were not included since they were used to determine the validities and reliabilities of the survey instruments.) Ninety-two school districts have an average daily attendance of over 10,000. Large school districts were selected because they are apt to have part-

or full-time public information officers and are located in or near cities which have large daily newspapers. The study was also limited to the fifty-two daily newspapers which are in the cities in which the districts are located. The newspapers were further limited to those which are printed in English and are not owned or managed by school districts and/or religious or political organizations. Not all school districts are located in cities which have daily newspapers; for example, Mt. Diablo Unified School District is located in Concord, which does not have a daily newspaper. News from such districts is covered by newspapers in surrounding communities.

Procedures

The participants in this study were the chief administrator of the two institutions--school districts and newspapers--and the person directly responsible for implementing institutional policy. In school districts, the superintendent is responsible for overall implementation of Board of Education policy, but the public information officer is directly responsible for day-to-day implementation of the policy. On a newspaper, the editor is responsible for overall implementation of the publisher's policy, but the reporter is directly responsible for day-to-day implementation of the policy. Thus, the population for this study was composed of the superintendent and the public information officer in school districts and the editor and the education reporter on newspapers.

Survey research methods were used in this study. Two survey instruments, based on a literature review, were developed by the researcher. One instrument was for school district personnel and

the other for newspaper personnel. Where appropriate, some of the same items were used on both instruments. Validity and reliability procedures were completed prior to distribution.

The data were analyzed using percents, frequencies, analysis of variance, and chi square test of association. On the school district survey, data from superintendents were compared to data from public information officers; on the newspaper survey, data from editors were compared to data from education reporters. In addition, educators' responses were compared to newsmen's responses for items which were on both surveys.

In summary, surveys were sent to superintendents, public information officers, editors, and education reporters in large school districts and cities in California. The data were analyzed using percents, frequencies, analysis of variance, and chi square test of association.

Summary

The school district is a public institution which comes under close scrutiny by the press. This close scrutiny frequently puts the two institutions in an adversarial relationship which can become hostile. However, techniques and procedures exist which districts can implement to improve their working relationship with the press and, thus, reduce hostility. Whether or not districts do so should be revealed by this study.

To provide data for the study, surveys were sent to school district and newspaper personnel in large school districts and cities in California. The data were analyzed using percents, frequencies, analysis of variance, and chi square test of association.

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I presented the purpose, significance, limitations, and definitions of the study. The related literature is reviewed in Chapter II. Chapter III contains the procedures used, including development of the survey, data collection results, and statistical treatment of the data. In Chapter IV, the data are analyzed and discussed. Chapter V, the final chapter, contains conclusions reached and recommendations for further study in the area of press/school district relationships.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Education and the press have much in common. Both were of vital concern to the framers of the United States Constitution; both depend upon words as their medium of information transmission; and both are public servants. Yet the relationship between the two institutions is frequently an uneasy one, filled with ambiguity and mistrust.

The literature on the subject of school district/press relations is not exhaustive and mainly limited to guides, manuals, and articles which purport to help school districts work with newspapers. Even this information is frequently contained in chapters of books on public relations or school/community relations. Various sources were used in the attempt to find literature on the relationship between the newspapers and school districts. The ERIC and Social Science Citation Index data bases were computer-searched, using the key words "newspaper," "editor," "reporter," "boards of education," "superintendent," "school district," "communications," and "relations." The Education Index, Dissertation Abstracts International, and Current Index to Journals in Education were reviewed. These searches and reviews went back to 1965, if possible.

The review of selected literature concentrates on five subjects: the role of the press as it relates to school districts, the need for effective working relationships between school districts

and the press, sources of conflict and problems between the two institutions, public information policies and procedures, and guidelines for working with the press. The literature review formed the basis for the development of the data collection instrument.

The Role of the Press

The rights of a free press in a democratic government are guaranteed in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. These rights guarantee the press access to information about public institutions, including school districts. The press provides information about institutions to the public it represents.

According to Sandman, the press is "the oldest and traditionally the most important source of current information."¹¹ The press serves as a channel of communication between institutions, such as school districts, and the community. Gross states:

The press is the major medium of public relations for most school systems. It usually constitutes the most important single channel of communication through which the community learns about and interprets the policies, programs and activities of its schools.¹²

Thus, one of the roles the press serves is as a source of information about school districts and other public institutions.

In addition to purveying information to the community, the press acts as an interpreter for the community. Editor and publisher Colburn believes that

The vast majority of parents are interested, but do not want to display their ignorance. This is where the press

¹¹Sandman, op. cit., p. 260.

¹²Gross, op. cit., p. 1.

can be extremely valuable as a communicator between the schools and the home . . . by reporting to parents the deficiencies as well as the assets of the school system in their own community.¹³

Thus, the press reports not only routine news about school functions, but also district deficiencies and strengths which provide a basis for community judgment.

The press views itself as a community watchdog which constitutionally has the right and responsibility to criticize and interpret acts of public officials, including educators.¹⁴ Educator McCloskey cautions fellow educators,

. . . journalists . . . make available for citizen consideration diverse types of information and views. Educators may reasonably question the wisdom with which educational affairs are reported and interpreted. But since education is a public service, they cannot question the right and responsibility of the press to obtain facts or to criticize.¹⁵

Educators who attempt to abrogate these rights are leaving themselves open to judicial censure, as well as intense public embarrassment.

In most communities, the school system is the largest public institution, as well as the largest consumer of public taxes and services.¹⁶ It, like most government institutions, is growing increasingly complex, remote--particularly in large districts--and incomprehensible to the average citizen. "It is," according to Cutlip,

¹³Colburn, op. cit., p. 123.

¹⁴Gordon McCloskey, Education and Public Understanding, (2nd ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 433.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶George Gerbner, "Newsmen and Schoolmen: The State and Problems of Education Reporting," Journalism Quarterly (Summer 1967), p. 211-224.

"the continuing task of the press to ferret out and publicize the actions of public officials."¹⁷ Thus, the role of the press is to explain, interpret, and clarify the actions of school districts.

Superintendents and school personnel need to understand the press' watchdog role. Brutch admonishes the school administrator, ". . . he has a moral and legal responsibility to allow review of his stewardship of the public's schools and in our country the press is an integral part of such a continuing review. . ."¹⁸ The key words in this quotation are "stewardship" and "public's schools;" the school administrator is a steward over a publicly owned entity. In his study, Frum states that

. . . the superintendent who laments that the editors and reporters are biased against schools and school officials because school issues are presented in an objective and balanced manner or the superintendent who attempts to coerce newspaper personnel into favorable stories and editorials demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the primary function of the newspaper.¹⁹

Frum suggests that superintendents need to understand the newspaper's role in conjunction with public schools. Board member and former reporter Mullins warns board members that

¹⁷Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Carter, Effective Public Relations, (4th ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 537.

¹⁸Al Brutch, "The School Administrator and the Press: Is Co-Existence Possible," Thrust, 3, (October, 1978), p. 14-15.

¹⁹Robert L. Frum, "A Status Study Contrasting Opinions Which Selected Newspaper Editors and School Superintendents Have of Each Other," (Doctoral dissertation, 1967, Ohio University), p. 16.

. . . the press is not present in your board room by virtue of your generosity and tolerance . . . not intruders in your private domain . . . (not) a flock of Nosey Parkers whose sole aim . . . is to stir up controversy and sell newspapers . . . Their job . . . is to render a necessary service to the community, to serve as its eyes, its ears, its voice.²⁰

Thus, superintendents, administrators, and board members need to not only understand the press' role but accept it. The press serves the public interest just as school districts and boards of education do. Their roles differ and frequently may come into conflict, but both are public stewards.

Communications professor Gerbner puts the need for cooperation much less philosophically when he states that ". . . schools have no alternative except to cooperate with the press. Putting it baldly, the press can hurt the schools but the schools have no effective club over the press."²¹ Stough supports this statement when he tells school people: "You have no choice about whether or not to get the news to the public. The public must get all the facts, without quibbling or reservations, or you will find an investigative reporter sliding open your filing cabinet drawers to snoop around, and telling the public you tried to cover up."²² Both Gerbner and Stough state that school personnel have no choice but cooperation with the press; both are very direct in their language. Whether

²⁰Carolyn Mullins, "Not Only How to Get Along with Your Local Newspaper, But How to Get Good Press, Besides," American School Board Journal, 158 (September 1970), p. 18-22.

²¹Gerbner, op. cit., p. 217.

²²Charles S. Stough, "Getting Along with the Media," School Management, 17, (January 1973), p. 56-57.

for philosophical or practical reasons, schools have no alternative to giving the press the information it seeks, according to these authors.

Journalists take their public watchdog role very seriously. Gerbner believes that ". . . the reporter's job is to emulate and cultivate the outlook of the average 'citizen and taxpayer' whose 'right to know' he guards."²³ Gerbner suggests that the reporter not only reports news but also guards citizens' right to knowledge. Sandman supports this public guardianship aspect of a reporter's job when he states that "Journalists as a group have a strong sense of responsibility to the public, and deep conviction that what they do has a significant impact on society . . ."²⁴ Sandman suggests that journalists believe they are not only guardians of the public's right to know, but instruments of societal change. According to Dapper, ". . . informing the public is no more than the duty of a newspaper . . . This strong sense of duty is very much evident in the way the men and women who write about education feel about their jobs."²⁵ Reporters, therefore, view themselves as guardians of the average citizen's right to be informed about public institutions, responsible to the citizenry, and instruments of social change.

²³Gerbner, op. cit., p. 216.

²⁴Sandman, op. cit., p. 74.

²⁵Gloria Dapper and Barbara Carter, "Is Education News," Saturday Review (March 17, 1962), p. 84-86 and p. 103-105.

Newspaper publishers also take their public mandate very seriously. One publisher states:

But my paper is not a propaganda agent for . . . schools. Blind partiality would be a betrayal of our responsibility. We recognize our obligation to keep readers informed about educational arrangements. . . citizens are entitled to . . . information about educational strengths and weaknesses. . . we reserve the right and the responsibility to express our opinions on our editorial page. We will not abdicate that function to anyone and we will resist all efforts to infringe upon it.²⁶

The above publisher states the paper's obligation to the public, as well as his commitment to resist abrogation of that right. Louis Seltzer of the Cleveland Press expresses the press' role thus:

The newspaper, if it is to discharge its duty to the schools, must serve them by being their civic "report card." The paper has an obligation to give the public a periodic accounting of what the schools are costing and just what the money is buying . . . to report accurately, objectively, and dramatically on classroom work and other activities . . . Only a thoroughly informed public can determine whether the schools are strong or weak and just what can be done about it.²⁷

In this context, the press has an obligation to serve not only as a public watchdog but also as a catalyst for school district evaluation and possible improvement.

Thus, the role of the press in relationship to public schools is major. Constitutionally, the press has the right of access to all information about public institutions, including schools.

²⁶McCloskey, op. cit., p. 434.

²⁷Gloria Dapper, Public Relations for Educators, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), p. 26.

The press is a channel of communication between the school district and the citizens; it is an interpreter of school district actions, programs, and policies; it is a community watchdog which criticizes and reviews actions of the district; it is the guardian of the citizen's right to know; it is an instrument of social change; and it is a catalyst for educational evaluation and improvement. Educators need to understand the role of the press as it relates to public schools for, if they do not, they could harm their working relationship with the press.

Working Relationship

School districts and newspapers are important institutions in most communities. Sometimes their conflicts keep them from being able to develop a cooperative working relationship, despite their shared interests and community importance.

School districts and newspapers have shared interests. In a democratic society, they have a common interest in developing an informed citizenry, and, according to Koerner, this common interest should be their bond of cooperation.²⁸ The two institutions not only are responsible for producing an informed citizenry but also are responsible for ". . . the successful functioning of our society and the preservation of our freedoms."²⁹ An informed citizenry

²⁸Thomas F. Koerner, "Why Your Board Deserves a Full-Time PR Man," American School Board Journal, 158 (September 1973), p. 36-38.

²⁹Everest P. Derthick and George J. Kienzle, "The Mutual Responsibility of the Schools and the Press," Theory Into Practice, III, No. 4 (October 1964), p. 119-120.

is a critical ingredient of a democratic society. Both schools and newspapers are public servants, responsible for communicating information to the citizenry.

The newspaper is one way the school district can communicate with the public. According to Clement, "Good press relations is crucial for any school district."³⁰ Developing good relations and teamwork with the press allows the school district to use a major communication vehicle to tell its story to the public. Koerner believes that journalists are willing to help school districts convey their stories to the public.³¹ The informing function of a newspaper is not the only service it can render a school district. "The superintendent who wishes to maintain a satisfactory public image of the school will realize the importance of the newspaper . . . as a molder of public opinion."³² Thus, school districts need to develop a better working relationship with the press to utilize the press' public information and opinion formation functions.

The literature strongly suggests that the responsibility for developing improved relations with the press is education's responsibility. Mullins states the need for "an effective pipeline to the community, and the best and most efficient one we have available is the local press. How well that pipeline functions is, in large part, our responsibility."³³ Clement supports Mullins' statement

³⁰Shirley M. Clement, "Take the First Step to Better Press Relations," The Public Relations Almanac for Educators, Vol. I (1980: The Educational Communications Center; Camp Hill, PA.), p. 58-61.

³¹Koerner, loc. cit.

³²Frederick, op. cit., p. 111.

³³Mullins, op. cit., p. 19.

by saying, ". . . school administrators must take the initiative."³⁴ Dapper states, "The schoolman cannot sit back and wait for the press to come to him."³⁵ The following statement by McCloskey clearly indicates the educator's responsibility in developing better understanding with the press:

. . . many of us who work with schools have failed to do our part to cooperate with the press because we do not understand it. The fact that some editors have been . . . uninformed about our work, and correspondingly uncooperative, does not absolve us of responsibility for seeking to understand all of the factors involved in increasing levels of understanding.³⁶

All of these authors emphatically state that it is the educator's responsibility to initiate procedures for developing a cooperative relationship with the press. McCloskey goes so far as to say that past negative experience with the press does not absolve educators of their responsibility to better the relationship with the press. Crosby chides schoolmen for ". . . not devoting enough time, thought and energy to the communication problem . . . The press cannot do the job alone . . . The schools must do their part."³⁷ Thus, schoolmen must not only take the initiative in developing better press relations but devote more time, thought, and energy to communication to help the press do its job of informing the public about educational concerns.

³⁴Clement, op. cit., p. 58.

³⁵Dapper, op. cit., p. 31.

³⁶McCloskey, op. cit., p. 444.

³⁷Otis A. Crosby, "The Challenge of Better Public Relations," Theory Into Practice, Vol. III, No. 4 (October 1964), p. 126-128.

The literature suggests that improving the relationship between school districts and newspapers should begin with the chief executive officer of each institution. According to Colburn, "In every community school chiefs should sit down with editors and publishers and attempt to arrive at a mutual understanding of their problems."³⁸ Clement suggests that this meeting take place in the editor's office since that will demonstrate the superintendent's positive desire to improve their working relationship.³⁹ In their studies, Zapytowski and Frum both recommend regular contacts between the superintendent and editor. Zapytowski concludes, "Superintendents need to know more about the ethics and operation of newspapers . . . the superintendent needs to make and maintain fruitful contact with his editor . . . such contact should be maintained on a relatively high priority basis."⁴⁰ Frum recommends that more personal contact needs to be maintained between the editor and superintendent; that, from this contact, they develop more confidence in each other; that they learn more about each other's jobs; and that they develop a freer exchange of ideas.⁴¹ Frum also recommends that the editor and superintendent hold regular conferences, that the superintendent make himself available to editors and reporters, and that the

³⁸Colburn, op. cit., p. 124.

³⁹Clement, loc. cit.

⁴⁰Joseph Zapytowski, "Role Perception and Expectations of a Selected Sample of School Superintendents and Weekly Newspaper Editors," (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1964), p. 216-217.

⁴¹Frum, op. cit., p. 122-125.

superintendent and editor cooperatively develop a plan for the systematic gathering to district news.⁴² Both Zapytowski and Frum recommend regular contact between the two chief executive officers, and both also recommend that each learn more about the other's job. Thus, the responsibility for improving the working relationship between schools and newspapers starts with the editor and superintendent, and it is the superintendent's responsibility to initiate the process.

Once the superintendent and editor have begun to trust each other, the district may need to initiate new management procedures to facilitate the flow of information to newspapers.⁴³ The most critical factor in developing a good relationship with the press is access to information and people.⁴⁴ This access needs to be built into the district's communication procedures. McCloskey states that access to information is the most critical ingredient in building an effective working relationship with the press.

Access to information, and our willingness to provide it, better enables publishers, editors, and reporters to understand school affairs and to report them accurately. Until our desire to make information available is demonstrated, effective working relationships are impossible.⁴⁵

Thus, the superintendent needs to implement procedures which will allow the press access to information. Without this

⁴²Ibid., p. 150-151.

⁴³Frederick, op. cit., p. 114.

⁴⁴Robert Krajewski, "Superintendent to Daughter: Why Don't You Reporters Shape Up?", The American School Board Journal, 167 (August 1980), p. 17-20.

⁴⁵McCloskey, loc. cit.

access, an effective working relationship between the two institutions is impossible.

Effective working relationships between school districts and newspapers should be possible because of their shared interests in providing information service to the community. Development of this relationship is the shared responsibility of the editor and superintendent; however, initiating the process is the superintendent's responsibility. Finally, the cornerstone of an effective working relationship is newsmen's access to district information, and superintendents need to implement policies and procedures which insure this access.

Sources of Conflict and Problems

Although school districts and newspapers share common interests and need to develop an effective working relationship, many factors can be sources of conflict in the relationship between school districts and the press. These range from the limitations of the newspaper to the way educators treat newsmen to the differing goals of the two institutions.

The newspaper itself, for example, is a source of conflicting goals. The reader wants to be entertained; the reporter wants to change the world; and the publisher wants to make money.⁴⁶ And, according to Sandman, in this conflict, the reporter usually loses.⁴⁷ In addition to conflicting goals, limitations in media

⁴⁶Sandman, op. cit., p. 266.

⁴⁷Ibid.

manpower, time, and space often lead to condensation of lengthy, complex articles.⁴⁸ The reader's desire for entertainment often leads to the publication of sensational stories, rather than informative stories. The publisher's desire to make money can lead to over-emphasis on the sensational stories since these sell papers and cater to the reader's desire to be entertained. Finally, manpower shortages can mean that reporters do not have the specialized knowledge for a particular area, such as education. Publishers dislike hiring specialized reporters because they cost more than all-purpose reporters.⁴⁹ Thus, the conflicting goals of the newspaper itself and the newspaper's time, space, and manpower limitations can lead to fewer or shorter education articles or to the more sensational aspects of education stories being emphasized.

The way school people treat reporters can also cause conflict between school districts and the press. Kindred identifies ten errors schoolmen make in their dealings with the press: bringing pressure to print or withhold a story, complaining when facts are incorrect or people misquoted, refusing to release timely information, releasing too many meaningless press releases, complaining if stories do not get published, becoming emotional with reporters, being drawn into controversies when the district is criticized, creating the impression that educators know more than the press

⁴⁸Cutlip, loc. cit.

⁴⁹Sandman, op. cit., p. 269.

about reader interest, failing to invite reporters to special events, and causing the reporter to wait for an interview.⁵⁰ According to Kindred, all of these practices show disrespect for the reporter and can lead to misunderstanding and conflict between school districts and newspapers.⁵¹ An educator who uses any of these is jeopardizing the school district's relationship with the newspaper.

Other writers suggest additional errors that educators make. A reporter on a Chicago newspaper states that during a teacher's strike, she could not get access to the administration so she quoted the teachers' organization, which was accessible.⁵² The reporter maintains that lack of access to administrators is one of the most serious public information errors an administrator can commit. Educators also have little ability to recognize hard news or differentiate it from soft news. If a story is to be newsworthy, it must be of consequence to a reasonable number of people and be of interest to these people--hard news.⁵³ Thus, the board of education's hiring of a noted disciplinarian as superintendent is news, but a class field trip is not. Furthermore, hard news is timely, local, and from an important source.⁵⁴ If educators

⁵⁰Leslie W. Kindred, Don Bagin, and Donald R. Gallagher, The School and Community Relations, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 215-216.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 215.

⁵²Krajewski, op. cit., p. 19.

⁵³Don Bagin, Frank Grazian, and Charles W. Harrison, School Communications: Ideas That Work, (Woodstown, N. J.: Communicaid Incorporated, 1972), p. 90-93.

⁵⁴Ibid.

are able to recognize hard news, they will be able to utilize district news resources more effectively and also have a greater chance of getting a story published or aired. In addition to hard news, newspapers also utilize soft news, or features. Feature stories have human appeal, reader identification, and self-interest.⁵⁵ These are frequently pictorial and planned further in advance than a hard news story. Educators need to learn to recognize possible feature stories in the district, for these stories usually portray some aspect of education in a positive light.

Professional educators and boards of education need to become aware of the kinds of errors they can make in working with the media. If they do not possess this awareness, they can, in all innocence, create a situation in which the media will become hostile to, or suspicious of, educators and education.

The relationship between the press and school districts is an uneasy one and frequently a source of problems between the two institutions. Brutch says it ". . . bears a striking resemblance of 'dogs to cats.'"⁵⁶ He further states, "To the administrator the reporter is too often seen to be at best a noisy nuisance hard after a story that 'sells newspapers'" and that "To the reporter, the administrator often seems to be a person whose college training included a course on how to expound long-winded, meaningless answers to simple direct questions."⁵⁷ Brutch suggests that the administrators'

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Brutch, op. cit., p. 14.

⁵⁷Ibid.

and reporters' perceptions of each other are negative; these negative perceptions then act as a source of conflict between the two persons.

According to Brutch, the jobs of the administrator and the reporter also bring them into conflict: running a school or a department is a difficult job, and the administrator likes people or institutions who help him or cause him no problems; one of the requirements of a good district is to have involved people believe the district is good, and people such as reporters who raise questions appear to be sabotaging the administrator; in periods of controversy, the administrator does not want to make statements; and the administrator tends to become so closely identified with the district that he interprets criticism as a sign of failure.⁵⁸ The reporter's job, on the other hand, requires that he seek information of value or interest to the reader without regard for whether or not it reflects adversely on an administrator or a school district, that he not be responsible for promoting events or actions about which he writes, that he become suspicious when he has trouble getting information, and that he simplify issues for non-expert readers.⁵⁹ Thus, the administrator's desire to promote district causes can come into conflict with the reporter's need to discover information, and the administrator's personal identification with district programs can be threatened by an inquiring reporter.

According to Gerbner, newsmen have problems with schoolmen for three reasons: educator's secretiveness, use of jargon, and

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

lack of news sense. Specifically, administrators fear that newspapers cannot be trusted to report accurately school news; educators cannot express themselves clearly to anyone outside the profession; entrenched administrators think of the district as their sphere, forgetting they are paid out of public funds; educators have no news sense; and administrators withhold information to which the public has a right.⁶⁰ Gerbner believes educators are public servants who should speak clearly and simply and have a sense of what constitutes news.

Gross' study of Eastern superintendents and editors supports much of what Brutch and Gerbner say. Asked if an editor should honor a request from a superintendent to withhold a story, 29 percent of the editors and 73 percent of the superintendents agreed.⁶¹ On the question of whether or not a newspaper should print any newsworthy item about schools, regardless of its effect on schools, 74 percent of the editors and 40 percent of the superintendents said the newspaper should print any item.⁶² Asked whether or not the superintendent should refuse to release certain kinds of information to the press, 58 percent of the editors and 95 percent of the superintendents agreed that he should refuse.⁶³ Gross' study showed that editors and superintendents have significant differences of opinion on issues regarding publication of school district news.

⁶⁰Gerbner, op. cit., p. 128.

⁶¹Gross, op. cit., p. 38.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., p. 36.

Frum's study of superintendents' and editors' perceptions support Gross' findings. Asked whether or not detrimental news should be printed, even though no evidence of wrongdoing existed, 83 percent of the editors and 54 percent of superintendents thought detrimental news about schools should be printed.⁶⁴ On the question of whether or not detrimental school news should be played down, 7 percent of editors and 46 percent of superintendents thought detrimental school news should be played down.⁶⁵ Frum's study reveals that, to a greater extent than editors, superintendents believe that detrimental news about schools should not be published or that it should be played down if published.

Gross also asked superintendents and editors to list their grievances against each other. The press' major grievances against educators were that ". . . school people are evasive in interviews, that educators have no sense of what news is, and that press releases are poorly written."⁶⁶ Superintendents' major grievances were that ". . . (1) the press overemphasizes 'bad' or 'sensational' news, (2) reporters assigned to school news spend only a small percentage

⁶⁴Frum, op. cit., p. 134-135.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Gross, op. cit., p. 29.

of their time on educational news and (3) the press does not work to make significant facts about education interesting."⁶⁷ The grievances which superintendents and editors have against each other suggest that neither perhaps knows as much as he could about each other's job and that the differing goals of the two institutions are a source of grievance. In his study of California administrators, Carter found that administrators agreed that

. . . editorials on education are often unfair and misleading . . . reporters who cover the schools usually lack an adequate understanding of the problems of public education . . . stories about education are often misleading because of incompleteness, and that much socially significant news gets crowded out of newspapers because it is not "sensational" enough to please editors.⁶⁸

Carter's findings appear to support Gross' results. Superintendents appear to perceive newspapers as emphasizing the sensational over the socially significant, publishing stories which are brief and misleading, and having inadequately prepared education reporters. These perceptions are a source of conflict between schools and the press.

The basic conflict between the two institutions is the press' need for exciting, uncontaminated news and the need to sell papers and the school districts' need to have news reported in a manner that will promote its objectives and not cause it trouble.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁸Roy E. Carter, Jr., "The Press and Public School Superintendents in California," Journalism Quarterly (Spring 1954), p. 175-185.

⁶⁹Cutlip, op. cit., p. 407.

Furthermore, editors view education as a "soft beat"; they believe public interest in education is limited to riots and controversies, not peaceful solutions to problems.⁷⁰ Thus, the newspaper's goal is to sell papers and to produce pure news; the educator's goal is to have news written which espouses district programs and does not cause it problems. The two goals are frequently antithetical to each other and conflict develops between the two institutions.

Conflict between educational systems and newspapers can be engendered by many factors. These include the newspaper's internal conflicting goals, the way educators treat newsmen, educators' lack of news sense, the uneasy relationship between the two institutions, differing perceptions of each other's function, the newspaper's need to be a profitable business, and differing news needs. Superintendents need to develop policies and procedures which mitigate the conflict in areas for which they are responsible, such as the educator's treatment of newsmen.

Policy and Procedures

A school district needs to develop a public information program which indicates its willingness to work with the press. This program should include development of a policy which reveals the district's commitment to give the public information. The program should also include specific procedures for implementing the policy.

⁷⁰Sandman, op. cit., p. 480.

The first step a school district should take in developing a public information program is to establish a policy which indicates the purpose or goals of the program.⁷¹ Such a policy will give the school district the basis for planning public information efforts, rather than having to manufacture them hastily each time after a crisis occurs. A public information policy will indicate to the community that the district is willing to share information with the public and that the district's actions can bear press and public scrutiny. The sample policies which follow indicate the districts' willingness to share information as well as indicating their acceptance of the public nature of education.

The policy frequently includes the purpose of the public information program. Mobile, Alabama's policy states its purpose is "To provide a two-way flow of information and interaction between the board and all groups . . ."⁷² Some school district policies indicate the public's right to be informed of district actions. The Alhambra, California, policy specifies the public nature of school systems:

Within the bounds of legal and ethical responsibilities to children, the Board of Education . . . has a right and responsibility to inform the public of significant happenings within its schools. It is the position of the Board that the schools belong to the public, and the public is entitled to be well informed about the operations of the school system.⁷³

⁷¹C. Z. Tibbals, "Hooray for Hollywood (Or, How to Get Your Story Out)," Thrust, 12 (January 1983), p. 28-29.

⁷²Kindred, op. cit., p. 31.

⁷³Ibid., p. 27.

The Alhambra policy clearly states both the board's responsibility to inform the public and the public's right to be informed.

Some public information policies state not only that the public has a right to district information, but also how this information will be transmitted to the public. The Union Free School District No. 6, Port Jefferson, New York, policy indicates board responsibility to keep the public informed, as well as specifying how it will do so:

The Board of Education accepts full responsibility for keeping the public informed about the function and operation of the school system. The Board will, through all related news media, express its collective thinking about what can and should be done to improve further the facilities and educational system of the Port Jefferson school system.⁷⁴

The Port Jefferson policy states that the Board will use the news media to inform the public about district operations and plans.

The Green Bay, Wisconsin, policy also states the public nature of school systems, as well as stating its news policy:

The Board of Education recognizes that all aspects of a public school system are of public interest and concern and believes that an open news policy is essential for public confidence in the schools. It acknowledges responsibility for informing the public of all of its actions, its policies and details of its business and educational operations.⁷⁵

The preceding policies have stated the public's right to be informed of district actions and operations, as well as the Board of Education's responsibility to keep the public so informed. The Port Jefferson

⁷⁴Gloria Dapper, Public Relations for Educators, p. 12.

⁷⁵Kindred, op. cit., p. 31-32.

and Green Bay policies have also stated that the Board will use the media in its public information efforts.

Some public information policies not only state Board of Education responsibility but also delineate how the Board's responsibility is to be implemented. Bagin believes that the board should adopt a "written policy that clearly spells out what the communication system is and who in the district is responsible for making it run."⁷⁶ Gordon McCloskey believes that "The superintendent of schools is responsible for the development and administration of all aspects of communication with the public."⁷⁷ Although the superintendent is ultimately responsible for implementing the Board of Education's public information policy, the daily implementation of the policy is frequently delegated to another administrator. The Beverly Hills, California, policy reveals this delegation, as well as the public information administrator's tasks:

It shall be the responsibility of the supervisor of information, under the direction of the Superintendent, to develop and execute public relations and publicity programs . . . sole responsibility for dissemination of all information concerning the district, its programs, and its personnel.⁷⁸

In Beverly Hills, the supervisor of information, as specified in board policy, has sole responsibility for dissemination of district information. The Corpus Christi, Texas, policy also shows this delegation as well as the public information administrator's tasks:

⁷⁶Bagin, op. cit., p. 2.

⁷⁷McCloskey, op. cit., p. 267.

⁷⁸Kindred, op. cit., p. 32.

Under direction of the superintendent, the coordinator of communications and publications shall be responsible for: coordinating the release of information to newspapers . . . radio stations . . . television stations . . . other news agencies or media . . .⁷⁹

In Cleveland Heights, Ohio, board policy details shared responsibility for publicity and public information:

All officers and their respective administrative and supervisory staffs shall, under the direction of the superintendent, decide upon and follow a continuing program of publicity. . . The Superintendent shall be responsible for news releases . . .⁸⁰

Although the board public information policy designates the superintendent as responsible for implementing policy, many superintendents, particularly in large school districts, are delegating their responsibility to other administrative personnel.⁸¹ Some board policies delineate this administrator's tasks; others do not.

Detailed board of education public information policies indicate the role and rights of the news media in a district's public information program. The Bloomington, Illinois, policy illustrates the importance of the press:

⁷⁹Gloria Dapper, Public Relations for Educators, p. 13-14.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 21.

⁸¹McCloskey, op. cit., p. 242.

The Local Newspaper

- (a) An internal school organization for the collecting and dissemination of news is necessary.
- (b) A channel for news release is imperative. The Superintendent of Schools, or someone delegated by him to do the job, is the liaison person for and coordinates the release of school news.
- (c) Good relationships with the editor and reporters are to be encouraged.⁸²

The Bloomington policy gives an example of a detailed public information policy which acknowledges the role the press can play in a public information program. The following sample policy exhibits the press' right to obtain information about public education:

School board members, administrators and teachers recognize newspapers . . . to be important means of keeping people informed about school services, problems, and needs . . . to provide representatives of all communications media with all available facts about schools. They recognize the rights of individual reporters to seek facts which are of special interest to them and will help them obtain such facts.⁸³

This policy indicates a district's willingness to work with the press and reinforces the press' constitutional right to obtain information about the school district. These policies show the importance of a good working relationship with the press, as well as the press' right to school district information.

The sample policies range from a general statement of purpose to a detailed description of job responsibilities. They do, however,

⁸²Gloria Dapper, Public Relations for Educators, p. 20.

⁸³McCloskey, op. cit., p. 378-379.

have commonalities: they acknowledge the public's right to school district information; they reveal board of education acceptance of its responsibility to keep the public informed; and they reflect the public nature of educational systems.

After a school district has adopted a public information policy, it needs to develop procedures and a program to implement the policy. A systematic procedure for implementing the public information policy, thus making school news readily available, is essential.⁸⁴

The first step in implementation of the public information policy is for the board of education to assign responsibility for public information to one person.⁸⁵ In small districts, the superintendent may assume this responsibility in addition to his other duties; however, in large districts, the superintendency has become so complex that another staff member frequently is responsible for public information policy implementation.⁸⁶ In his study, Frederick found that 72 percent of the superintendents surveyed reported a need for a central office public information/relations specialist.⁸⁷ The individual is frequently in charge of all school/community relations. Most boards and superintendents

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 444.

⁸⁵Gloria Dapper, Public Relations for Educators, p. 24.

⁸⁶Koerner, loc. cit.

⁸⁷Frederick, op. cit., p. 42.

need the assistance of a full-time specialist who knows communication principles and who has the competence to utilize newspapers to tell the school story.⁸⁸

In most districts, the person holds a staff position and reports directly to the superintendent.⁸⁹ His responsibilities vary from district to district; but his functions include research, advisement, planning, coordination, communication, and evaluation.⁹⁰ Factors which influence the scope of the person's job are role perception of the board, size of the district, money available, kinds of district problems, and community image of the system. Qualifications for the position may include a college degree in journalism/communications or public relations and experience in education, public relations, or both.⁹¹

Once this public information officer is hired, he should work closely with the board of education, the superintendent, and the top administrative team to develop public information procedures and plans for the district. Both the public information policy and procedures should be well-publicized and distributed to the media and the school community.

In addition to working with the board of education, the superintendent, and the administrative team, the public information

⁸⁸McCloskey, op. cit., p. 295.

⁸⁹"The School Public Relations Administrator 1970-71," Educational Research Circular, No. 3., Arlington, Virginia: Educational Research Service: 1971, p. 3.

⁹⁰Kindred, op. cit., p. 325.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 326.

officer should confer with the editors of all the local newspapers serving the school district and reach working agreements about certain procedures.⁹² These procedures include the following: the names and telephone numbers of reporters assigned to cover school news, the amount of time the reporters can devote to school news, the extent to which editors want the school staff to supplement the reporter's work, types of information the editors consider newsworthy, the form and style which district personnel should use to submit news, and the deadlines by which news is to be reported.⁹³ Establishing these procedures with the newspaper personnel will give school personnel a better grasp of the newspaper's needs and, thus, increase the chances of getting school news published.

A well-conceived public information policy, augmented by effective procedures, will benefit a district both in times of crisis and in times of tranquility. Districts with effective public information programs are equipped to handle a crisis by providing honest and open answers to public questions and by using the press to explain situations. An informed public is a less fearful public. During periods of tranquility, districts with a public information program can utilize the time to inform the public of district goals, programs, and plans. Having a public information policy and program allows a district to guide the effect which events have on the school community; not having a policy and program allows the events

⁹²McCloskey, op. cit., p. 444.

⁹³Ibid., p. 445.

themselves to determine the effect on the community. Having a public information policy and program also improves the district's relationship with the press.

Guidelines

The literature is replete with advice and guidelines for working with the press. This advice ranges from how to treat reporters to how to write press releases. Implementing these guidelines into a public information program can help a school district improve its press coverage, as well as its working relationship with the press.

Although the editor is responsible for implementing the publisher's policy, the reporter is the person with whom school personnel have the most frequent contact. Several authors have suggested ways in which to work effectively with reporters. Lewis, for example, says, "The Golden Rule in dealing with reporters should be: Find or direct the reporter to the specific information he wants, quickly and efficiently."⁹⁴ The reporter should be helped to meet his deadlines.⁹⁵ The reporter is rushed not only because news is perishable, but because printing of the newspaper will seldom be held up for a story on education. The educator can also help the reporter by understanding the reporter's role.⁹⁶ The reporter finds and writes news stories; others on the paper edit, set

⁹⁴Anne E. Lewis, "Better Press Relations for Schools," Theory Into Practice, Vol. III, No. 4 (October 1964), p. 145-153.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

type, do the layout, and write headlines. Thus, if an error occurs in a story, it may not be the reporter's fault.

In addition to knowing how to help the reporter meet deadlines and understanding the reporter's job, the superintendent and public information officer should know all reporters on a first-name basis.⁹⁷ The first-name basis will lead to establishing rapport between the district and the newspaper. Rapport is not a guarantee against criticism, but it can insure a fair chance of telling the district's side of a story. Once this rapport is established, the superintendent will be able to level with the reporter about the impact of news stories.⁹⁸ For example, if publication of a story at a particular time will impede the superintendent's ability to act, the reporter may agree to release the story at a later date. The superintendent should also give the reporter management team home telephone numbers.⁹⁹ The reporter may need more details on a story after district offices close, and, if he has the home telephone numbers, he can contact the right administrator to complete his story by deadline time.

The public information officer should compile a directory of key news contacts in the district, including telephone numbers, office location, and program responsibility.¹⁰⁰ These people should also offer news and feature story ideas to the reporter.¹⁰¹ With

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 211.

⁹⁸Brutch, op. cit., p. 15.

⁹⁹Kindred, op. cit., p. 213.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Brutch, op. cit., p. 15.

a directory of names, the reporter knows where to go to get news, and the school people he contacts may give him leads for additional stories.

All of a reporter's questions should be answered honestly and promptly. Under no circumstances should a reporter be told a lie or a half-truth, or led to a wrong conclusion.¹⁰² The truth may put the superintendent, a member of his staff, or the district in an unflattering light; however, not telling the truth will only increase the reporter's resolve to get the complete story, which will be published along with a story on the district's prevarication.¹⁰³ Most questions not only may, but should, be answered. Stories about school district problems will get published with or without the district's assistance. Not only should a reporter's questions be answered truthfully, but promptly.¹⁰⁴ A reporter has deadlines to meet, and the educator who respects those deadlines will respond quickly to a reporter's inquiries. If the question cannot be answered immediately because of lack of information, Kindred recommends that the educator say "I don't know. I'll call you back in ten minutes,"¹⁰⁵ and then do so. Even though the questions may be painful and the educator busy, all of a reporter's questions should be answered honestly and promptly.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Mullins, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁰⁴Clement, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁰⁵Kindred, op. cit., p. 210.

The superintendent and/or public information officer should furnish reporters with "as much information as possible to insure a complete and accurate story."¹⁰⁶ Techniques to provide this service include having name cards with correct spelling in front of board of education members and administrators at meetings; giving reporters copies of reports, statements, and agendas prior to meetings; holding background meetings with reporters to explain complicated issues; being available when negative news occurs; alerting reporters ahead of time to any important announcements or critical items on a meeting agenda; being available after meetings to give reporters additional information if they desire it;¹⁰⁷ and giving notes to a reporter unable to attend a meeting.¹⁰⁸ Most reporters want to write objective, accurate, and complete stories. A school district that provides reporters with accurate and complete information is helping a reporter to write objective, accurate, and complete stories.

In addition to providing a reporter with information, the school district personnel should extend certain courtesies to a reporter. If a meeting is cancelled or postponed, the reporter should be informed ahead of time.¹⁰⁹ Reporters' schedules are just as busy as educators' are, and the school person who takes

¹⁰⁶Clement, op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Bagin, op. cit., p. 116.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

the time to extend this courtesy to a reporter will generate good will with the reporter. An educator should never ask to see a story before it is published.¹¹⁰ Such a request impugns a reporter's professional ability to write a story. All reporters should be treated with the same professional respect.¹¹¹ Even though some reporters are more cooperative or competent than others, they all have the same constitutional right to information.¹¹² Even if a reporter is hostile to a school district, he cannot be denied information. Reporters should be complimented for stories which are well-written and timely.¹¹³ Finally, educators should dial their own telephone calls when contacting reporters; they should not use titles, and they should not refer to themselves as "Doctor" or "Mister."¹¹⁴ According to Bagin, reporters are used to dealing with high-level public officials, and the use of a title will appear condescending.¹¹⁵ Extending courtesy to a reporter demonstrates that the educator respects the reporter and his craft.

The literature also offers suggestions about writing press releases and language use. The press release should conform to journalistic style.¹¹⁶ If it does not, it frequently will get

¹¹⁰Kindred, op. cit., p. 210.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 214.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 215.

¹¹⁴Stough, op. cit., p. 57.

¹¹⁵Bagin, op. cit., p. 117.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 97-102.

lost in the quantity of publicity material that comes into a newspaper office. Educational jargon should be avoided in favor of straightforward language.¹¹⁷ The reporter, himself, may not understand the jargon, and his readers certainly will not. Educators have been accused of confusing issues by using "education-ese" and not speaking the language of the common man, thus creating a credibility gap and distrust.¹¹⁸ Therefore, press releases should be written in straightforward language in a journalistic format, and educators should use everyday language in reports and interviews.

The literature suggests caution in handling errors in stories. The reporter may not have been responsible for the error. If the error does not invalidate the story, it is perhaps best ignored.¹¹⁹ A retraction or correction frequently keeps the issue in the news. However, if the error is serious, the educator should give the reporter a chance for correction and not go directly to the editor. "Too many school officials overreact to errors in the press,"¹²⁰ according to Bagin.

The literature also suggests caution about "off the record" remarks. Brutch states, "Don't talk off the record. A reporter is not there to satisfy idle curiosity. If it's not fit to print or broadcast, it's not a fit subject for discussion."¹²¹ Mullins

¹¹⁷Kindred, op. cit., p. 209-210.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Brutch, op. cit., p. 15.

¹²⁰Kindred, op. cit. p. 214.

¹²¹Brutch, loc. cit.

concur and says, "Never presume that a casual comment passed to a reporter . . . won't be printed."¹²² Kindred believes that talking "off the record" is risky and can cause problems if not properly understood by all parties concerned.¹²³ Off-the-record information can give a reporter more understanding of complex and controversial issues; however, participants must have a high level of trust in each other to exchange off-the-record information. Some reporters view off-the-record remarks as being disparaging of their professional integrity; others view them as a source of background information. Unless the educator is aware of a reporter's stance on this issue, he should avoid "off-the-record" remarks.

In summary, the literature suggests practices which school districts should employ in working with the press. These practices include treating reporters courteously and fairly, providing them quickly with all of the information they request, understanding their job and deadlines, using straightforward language, and reacting sensibly to errors in stories. Districts which employ these practices will enhance their chances of having accurate stories published in the newspaper. However, using these practices will not guarantee coverage which always portrays districts in a flattering aspect.

¹²²Mullins, op. cit., p. 22.

¹²³Kindred, op. cit., p. 211.

Summary

The related literature was reviewed in Chapter II. The chapter focused on the role of the press as it relates to public school districts, effective working relationships between the two institutions, sources of conflict and problems between school districts and the press, public information policies and procedures, and guidelines for working with the press. The literature formed the basis for the development of the survey instrument described in Chapter III.

Chapter III describes the population, instrumentation, procedures, and statistical treatment of the data. The data are analyzed in Chapter IV. Chapter V describes the conclusions reached and suggests areas for further study.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The public nature of school districts makes their actions subject to the scrutiny of the press, which considers itself a watchdog of public agencies and advocate for the public. This public advocacy position of the press can bring it into conflict with school districts who, like many public agencies, are uncomfortable under close study. The purpose of this study was to analyze the nature of the relationship between the press and large school districts in California.

Population

The population for this study was drawn from California school districts having over ten thousand average daily attendance (ADA) and the newspapers in the cities in which the districts are located. This population consisted of personnel from ninety-three school districts and fifty-two newspapers. School district and newspaper personnel in Sacramento County were not included because they were involved in the development of the survey instrument.

The population consisted of four groups: superintendents and public information officers from school districts and the editor and education reporter on newspapers. Since not all school districts have public information officers, either full- or part-time, the public information officer population consisted of sixty-seven

persons, while the superintendent population numbered ninety-three. One newspaper had two editors, so that the editors numbered fifty-three. Some newspapers had no education reporters or person responsible for covering education news, while others had more than one person assigned to cover education. Five newspapers had no one assigned to education news; two newspapers had two reporters assigned to education; one newspaper had three reporters assigned to education. In all, the education reporter population consisted of fifty persons. Thus, the total accessible population numbered 93 superintendents, 67 public information officers, 53 editors, and 50 education reporters--160 educators, and 103 journalists.

Instrumentation

Survey research methods were used to gather data from the population. Two instruments were developed, one for the educators and another for the journalists. These instruments were field-tested for validity and reliability, using educators and journalists from school districts and newspapers in Sacramento County.

The literature review was the primary basis for the development of the survey instrument. Further additions to the instruments stemmed from discussions with public information officers and reporters, as well as from the researcher's personal experience in being interviewed by reporters and preparing public information brochures and programs about school district projects. Once developed, the survey instruments went through three steps before being distributed to the population.

Before being sent to the target population, the surveys were submitted to a panel of experts; they were tested for validity, and they were field tested for reliability. Modifications were made in the survey instruments as a result of these procedures. After these modifications, the surveys were distributed to the target population.

Panel of Experts

The first step was a review by a panel of experts. The experts included a school district public information officer who had also been a newspaper reporter, a school district associate superintendent, a senior research analyst, two education reporters, a professor of educational research, and a professor of educational administration who had also been a superintendent. The experts were asked to review the instruments for clarity of language, relationship to the study's objectives, general impression on the recipient, ease in completing, and survey format. The experts were asked to be very critical in their analysis of the survey. After their analysis, the instruments were refined to incorporate their suggestions and then reevaluated by three of the experts.

Validity

The next step in the development of the surveys was a determination of their validities. The newspaper survey was sent to two editors, three education reporters, and a former State Department of Education public information officer and newspaper reporter. The educators' survey was sent to an assistant superintendent, four program directors, and an administrator of research and

evaluation services. Recipients were sent the appropriate surveys, a comment sheet, and a copy of the study's objectives. Recipients were asked to complete the survey and the comment sheet.

On the comment sheet, recipients were asked whether or not the survey questions seemed to address the study's objectives; all twelve respondents indicated that the questions did address the study's objectives. Recipients were also asked whether or not the survey was easy or difficult to read or complete; ten people indicated the survey was easy to read and complete, one difficult, and one in-between easy and difficult. Respondents were asked whether any questions needed changing and, if so, how they should be changed; five people indicated no changes were necessary, seven people indicated changes were necessary in two items. Finally, respondents were asked how long the survey took to complete; their answers ranged from ten to fifteen minutes. Based on the respondents' comments, the surveys were determined to be a valid measure of the study's objectives; however, two survey items were altered as a result of the validity study.

Reliability

The final step in the development of the survey instruments was the determination of their reliabilities. Reliability was tested by sending the surveys to superintendents, assistant superintendents, public information officers, editors, city editors, and reporters in school districts and newspapers in Sacramento County. The surveys were sent to the same people two times, separated by a period of four weeks, to ascertain whether or not the surveys

were reliable. Thirty-four surveys were sent to educators; twenty-five recipients, or 75 percent, returned both surveys. Twenty surveys were sent to journalists; fourteen, or 70 percent, were returned both times. Two mailings were done. A cover letter, explaining the purpose of the study and the importance of ascertaining reliability, accompanied each mailing. Items which asked for a fact, rather than an opinion or perception, were not field-tested. Copies of the surveys are on pages 109 through 112 in Appendix A.

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the reliability of questions 1 - 14 on the educators' survey and items 1 - 12 on the journalists' survey. These items asked the respondents to express their opinion using a Likert-type scale with five choices. The reliability results of applying the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to these data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Item Reliabilities of the Survey on
School District/Press Relationships Using
the Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Coefficient Range ^a	Educator Item No.	Journalist Item No. ^b
.10 - .19	14	7
.20 - .29		
.30 - .39	6, 11	1
.40 - .49	5	3, 5, 6, 12
.50 - .59	7, 9, 10, 12	
.60 - .69	2, 3, 8, 13	2
.70 - .79	1, 4	4, 8, 9
.80 - .89		11
.90 - 1.00		

^aEven though Items 6, 11, and 14 on the educators' survey and Items 1 and 7 on the journalists' survey had low reliability, these items were included on the population survey to give additional information.

^bItem 10 on the journalists' survey could not be computed because all respondents checked choice "5" on the post-test.

An analysis of the table indicates that the median item reliability is in the .50 - .59 coefficient range. These findings indicate that the respondents were satisfactorily consistent in their responses over a time span of four weeks. The reliability coefficient for each item is included in Appendix D on page 128.

Items 16 through 18 on the educators' survey and 14 through 18 on the journalists' survey had a number of choices which respondents could check to indicate their opinion. On the educators' survey, item 16 had six choices; item 17 had ten choices; and item 18 had twenty-one choices. On the journalists' survey, items 14 and 15 each had eight choices; item 16 had six choices; item 17 had ten choices; item 18 had twenty-one choices. On all of these items, respondents were asked to check as many choices as were applicable to the question. These items were analyzed using percent agreement between the first response and the second response.

The results of the percent agreement analysis between the first and second response are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Item Reliability of the Survey on
School District/Press Relationships
Using Percent Agreement

Percent Range	Educator Item No.	Journalist Item No.
60 - 64	18b	
65 - 69		15c, 16e
70 - 74	16f, 18j, 18m, 18t	14c, 15d, 15g, 16b, 16c, 17d
75 - 79	16a, 16b, 16c, 17a, 17c, 17d, 17i, 18c, 18f, 18u	
80 - 84	16e, 17e, 17g, 18e, 18p	14h, 15a, 15e, 15f, 15h, 16a, 16f, 17e
85 - 89	16d, 17b, 18g, 18l, 18q, 18s	14e, 14f, 14g, 16d, 17b, 17g

Table 2 (continued)

Percent Range	Educator Item No.	Journalist Item No.
90 - 94	17f, 17h, 18i, 18n, 18o	14b, 14d, 17a, 17c, 17f, 17h, 17i, 17j
95 - 100	17j, 18a, 18d, 18h, 18k, 18r	14a, 15b

An analysis of these data reveals that the median range is 80 - 84 percent and that the respondents were generally consistent in responding to these items. The percent agreement between the first and second responses for each item is included on pages 129 and 130 in Appendix D. Analysis of item 18 on the journalists' survey indicated that the directions were not clear and that too many responses were requested for each choice; therefore, when the survey was sent to the population, the item was changed to be identical to the item on the educators' survey.

Procedures

Procedures used in the survey research approximated those suggested by Borg and Gall.¹²⁴ The target population was sent a survey, cover letter, and an addressed and stamped return envelope. Two mailings were sent out.

The population was comprised of superintendents and public information officers in large California school districts, as well as the editors and education reporters of the newspapers in the

¹²⁴Walter R. Borg and Meredith Damien Gall, Educational Research (3rd ed., New York: Longman, 1979), p. 302-309.

cities in which the large districts are located. The names and addresses of the superintendents and public information officers were taken from the 1983 California Public Schools Directory.¹²⁵

The names and addresses of the editors and reporters were taken from the 1983 Yearbook Editor and Publisher International.¹²⁶

Telephone calls were made to the school districts and newspapers if names were not listed in the directories for any of the positions.

Each survey recipient was sent a cover letter from the researcher explaining the purpose of the survey. Each cover letter was addressed personally to the recipient and signed by the researcher. The surveys were printed back-to-back on legal-sized paper. The surveys were anonymous but were coded so that the researcher could keep track of responses. A stamped, self-addressed envelope was included with each survey. The first mailing was done on December 9, 1983 and, because of the holidays and school vacations, not due back to the researcher until January 5, 1984. Copies of the population surveys are on pages 113 through 116 of Appendix A, and copies of the cover letters are on pages 118 and 119 of Appendix B.

In the first mailing, 263 surveys were sent. Table 3 indicates the results of the first mailing.

¹²⁵1983 Public Schools Directory, Sacramento, CA: California State Department of Education.

¹²⁶1983 Yearbook Editor and Publisher International, New York: Editor and Publisher.

Table 3
Response to the First Mailing
of the Survey to the Population

Respondent Group	Number Mailed	Number Returned	Percent Returned
Superintendent	93	60	65%
Public Information Officer	67	57	85%
Editor	53	24	45%
Reporter	50	28	56%
Total	263	169	64%

An analysis of this table indicates that educators' response to the first mailing was greater than the journalists' response.

For the second mailing, a support letter from a superintendent accompanied the cover letter and survey to educators. A support letter from an education reporter accompanied the cover letter and survey to journalists. Again, the cover letter was addressed personally to each respondent, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope was enclosed with each survey. The second mailing was done on January 25, 1984, and due back February 3, 1984. Copies of the cover letters for the second mailing are on pages 120 through 123 of Appendix B. Copies of the support letters are on pages 125 and 126 of Appendix C. Ninety-four surveys were sent on the second mailing, and thirty-five surveys, or 36 percent, were returned.

In all, 263 people received surveys; between the first and second mailings, 204 people, or 78 percent, returned the surveys.

Table 4 indicates the total response for both mailings.

Table 4
Total Response to the Survey Instrument

Respondent Group	Number Mailed	Number Returned	Percent Returned
Superintendent	93	77	83%
Public Information Officer	67	58	87%
Editor	53	36	68%
Reporter	50	33	66%
Total	263	204	78%

An analysis of this table indicates that educators responded in greater numbers to the survey than did journalists.

Survey respondents were asked if they wished a copy of the results of the study. Of the journalists, fifty-one people, or 75 percent, indicated they wanted a copy of the results of the study. Of the educators, ninety-three people, or 67 percent, indicated they wanted a copy.

Procedures used to gather data for the study included cover letters, support letters, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for returning the survey. In addition, the cover letters were addressed personally to each survey recipient. Recipients were also asked if they desired a copy of the results of the study. Two mailings were sent out to increase the response rate.

Statistical Treatment

The study had six objectives. Each objective had a number of survey items which attempted to elicit data which would achieve the objective. The statistical treatment which the data received depended upon the format of the question.

The study's six objectives were as follows:

1. Determine the frequency with which districts have adopted specific public information policies and procedures
2. Identify the districts' public information practices
3. Identify the superintendents' and public information officers' perception of how the district is treated by the press
4. Identify superintendents' and public information officers' and editors' and education reporters' perceptions of the press' role in public education
5. Evaluate, as perceived by the press, school districts' public information efforts
6. Identify superintendents' and public information officers' and editors' and education reporters' perceptions of their working relationship.

Table 5 indicates the item numbers from the population survey which support each objective.

Table 5
Correlation Between
the Objectives and the Survey Items

Objective	Educator Item No.	Journalist Item No.
1	1 - 10	1, 3, 4
2	28	22
3	11 - 16	
4	19 - 24	9 - 14
5		5, 6, 15, 16, 18, 19
6	17, 18, 26, 27	7, 8, 20, 21

Chi square test of association was used to determine whether or not responses differed between superintendents and public information officers and between editors and reporters on each of the respective surveys.

Fourteen items were on both surveys. Table 6 indicates which items were on both population surveys, as well as the statistical treatment the item received.

Table 6
Statistical Treatment of Items
Which Were on Both Surveys

Educator Item Number	Journalist Item Number	Statistical Treatment
1	1	Chi square
9	3	Chi square
10	4	Chi square
17	7	ANOVA
18	8	ANOVA
19	9	ANOVA
20	10	ANOVA
21	11	ANOVA
22	12	ANOVA
23	13	ANOVA
24	14	ANOVA
26	20	Chi square
27	21	Chi square
28	22	Chi square

Chi square test of association was used to determine differences between educators and journalists for those items with a more than one choice response. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine differences between educators and journalists for those items which used a Likert-type scale response.

In addition to the item analysis, the survey responses from the first mailing were compared to the survey responses from the second mailing to determine the representativeness of the entire population. The 169 first-mailing responses were compared to the 36 second-mailing responses. Chi square test of association was used to determine whether or not the responses on the first mailing differed significantly from those on the second. No statistically significant difference was found between the results of the first and second mailing.

The items which supported the study's six objectives were statistically treated using chi square test of association and ANOVA. In addition, first- and second-mailing responses were also analyzed using chi square test of association.

Summary

Chapter III described the population, instrumentation, procedures, and statistical treatment of the data. The population included personnel from large school districts in California and personnel from newspapers in cities in which the school districts are located. The section on instrumentation discussed the development of the surveys, which included submission to a panel of experts, validity testing, and field-testing for reliability. The procedures used for the survey research included two mailings, cover letters, support letters, and stamped, self-addressed return envelopes. The data were statistically treated using chi square test of association and ANOVA.

In Chapter IV, the data are analyzed and discussed. Chapter V presents conclusions and recommendations for further study in school district/press relationships.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In many cities, the public school district is the largest consumer of tax dollars and services. The school district is also an institution with which most people have had some experience, be it with their children or their own school experience. Most cities also have a newspaper. The newspaper considers itself a public advocate whose role is to interpret and evaluate the actions of public institutions for the citizens. The relationship between the school district and the newspaper can be an uneasy, frequently adversarial one.

This study attempted to clarify and analyze the existing relationship between large school districts and the press in California. To provide this clarification and analysis, the study had six objectives dealing with school district public information policies and procedures, school district public information practices, educators' perceptions of press treatment, the press' role in public education, school district public information efforts, and the educators' and journalists' perceptions of their working relationship. Survey research methods were used to gather the data. Separate surveys were developed for educators and journalists. The educators' survey was sent to superintendents and public information officers, and the journalists' survey was sent to editors and education reporters. Some survey items

were on both instruments; thus, both educators and journalists responded to these items.

Policy and Procedures

The literature indicates that the first step a district should take in improving its working relationship with the press is to develop and implement specific public information policies and procedures.

Objective 1. Determine the frequency with which districts have adopted specific public information policies and procedures.

Both educators and journalists were asked to respond to survey items relating to this objective. Ten items on the educators' survey dealt with the objective on district policies and procedures.

Table 7 indicates educators' responses.

Table 7
Educators' Responses to Survey Items on
District Public Information Policies and Procedures

Item	Percent Yes	Percent No
Does your district have a specific public information/press policy?	59%	41%
If yes, are the newspaper personnel aware of your policy?	82%	18%
Does your district have a Public Information Officer (PIO) or its equivalent?	69%	31%
If yes, does the PIO have a staff?	64%	36%
Does the PIO have a budget, exclusive of salaries?	83%	17%

Table 7 (continued)

Item	Percent Yes	Percent No
Does the PIO report directly to the superintendent?	84%	16%
Is the PIO part of the superintendent's executive staff or council?	67%	33%
Does your district have specific procedures for working with the press?	67%	33%

These data reveal that 59 percent of the respondents indicated that their districts have specific public information/press policies and that, according to superintendents and public information officers, the press is aware of the district's policy. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that their districts have a public information officer or its equivalent, although he has a staff in only 64 percent of the districts. Most of the public information officers do have a working budget and report directly to the superintendent. However, the public information officer is part of the superintendent's executive staff in only two-thirds of the respondents' districts. Although only 59 percent of the respondents' districts have public information policies, 67 percent of the districts have specific procedures for working with the press.

Superintendents and public information officers were also asked for additional information about their public information/press policies and procedures. Table 8 outlines their responses.

Table 8

Educators' Responses to Survey Items Asking
for Additional Information on Policy/Procedures

Item	Percent of Responses
PIO Assignment	
Full Time	61%
Part Time	39%
PIO's Staff	
1 - 3 People	83%
4 - 7 People	6%
8+ People	11%
PIO's Budget	
Under \$5,000	29%
\$ 5,000 - \$ 9,999	25%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	20%
\$15,000+	26%
Press' First District Contact	
Superintendent	43%
Public Information Officer	58%
Any Administrator	23%
PIO Education and Training	
Journalism	62%
Public Relations	73%
Teaching or Administrative	38%

Table 8 indicates that 61 percent of the respondents state that their district's public information officer is full time, that 83 percent state his office is staffed by one person, and that the size of his budget generally is below \$15,000. Table 8 also indicates that the superintendent or public information officer is generally

the first person in the district the reporter contacts and that the public information officer should have experience in journalism or public relations. Complete statistical analyses for Tables 7 and 8 are included on pages 132 and 133 in Appendix E.

Editors and education reporters were also asked to respond to some of the items to which superintendents and public information officers responded. Table 9 indicates their responses.

Table 9

Journalists' Responses to Survey Items on
Districts' Public Information Policies and Procedures

Item	Percentage of Responses
Do the large school districts in your area have specific public information/press policies?	68% Yes 32% No
Press' first district contact	
Superintendent	18%
Public Information Officer	14%
Any Administrator	15%
Varies from district to district	35%
PIO Education and Training	
Journalism	47%
Public Relations	23%
Teaching or Administrative	23%

Although not one of the objectives of this study, journalists were also asked whether or not their paper had a reporter assigned to cover school news; 97 percent of the respondents indicated that their paper had a reporter assigned to school news. Table 9 indicates that 68 percent of the respondents believe the school districts in their area have public information/press policies,

that the press' first district contact varies from district to district, and that journalists believe public information officers should have a journalism background. A complete statistical analysis for Table 9 is included on page 134 in Appendix E.

Educators and journalists both responded to some of the survey items. Table 10 summarizes their responses.

Table 10
Educators' and Journalists' Responses
to Selected Survey Items

Item	Percent of 'Yes' Response	
	Educators	Journalists
Districts have a specific public information/press policy	59%	68%
Press' First District Contact		
Superintendent	43%	22%
Public Information Officer	58%	13%
Any Administrator	23%	22%
Recommended PIO Training and Education		
Journalism	62%	74%
Public Relations	73%	41%
Teaching/Administrative	38%	46%

Chi square test of association was used to determine whether or not the two groups responded with statistically different responses. A level of less than .05 was established as the level of significance. Using .05 as the level of significance, educators and journalists responded significantly differently on three items from Table 10. The three items were the press' first district contact being the

superintendent or the public information officer, and the need for the public information officer to have public relations training. A complete statistical analysis for Table 10, plus the level of significance for each item, is included on page 135 of Appendix E.

In summary, the study's first objective was to determine whether or not school districts have specific public information/press policies and procedures. The data reveal that a majority of the large school districts do have such policies and that, in most cases, the press is aware of the policy. The data also show that a majority of the districts have a full- or part-time public information officer, that he has a staff and budget, that he does report directly to the superintendent and is part of the superintendent's executive staff. The data further show that a majority of the districts do have specific procedures for working with the press. The data show disagreement between educators and journalists about whom the press first contacts in a school district and what type of training and education the public information officer should have.

Practices

The literature is replete with suggestions of practices districts should and should not employ in their dealings with the press. According to the literature, educators should employ all of the practices listed below, except the following: correct errors in facts which occur in stories, talk off the record with reporters, suggest how a story should be written, use educational language in press releases and interviews, and react publicly to headlines and editorials.

Objective 2. Identify the districts' public information practices.

Both educators and journalists were asked to respond to the survey item dealing with this objective. Respondents were asked to check the practices which the districts' administrative staff employ. Twenty-one practices were listed. Table 11 indicates the educators' and journalists' responses.

Table 11
Educators' and Journalists' Responses to
Survey Item on District Public Information/Press Practices

Practices	Percentage of Responses	
	Educators	Journalists
Are accessible to reporters	94%	84%
Correct errors in facts which occur in stories	59%	68%
Give reporters staff home telephone numbers	39%	46%
Respond promptly to reporters' inquiries	93%	62%
Send out accurate and useful press releases	78%	22%
Know reporters by first name	88%	76%
Talk off the record to reporters	38%	52%
Suggest how a story should be written	12%	13%
Compliment reporters for stories	82%	43%
Give notes to reporters unable to attend meetings	73%	16%
Reserve space for reporters at board of education meetings	93%	77%
Solicit reporters' advice about the district's public information program	27%	13%

Table 11 (continued)

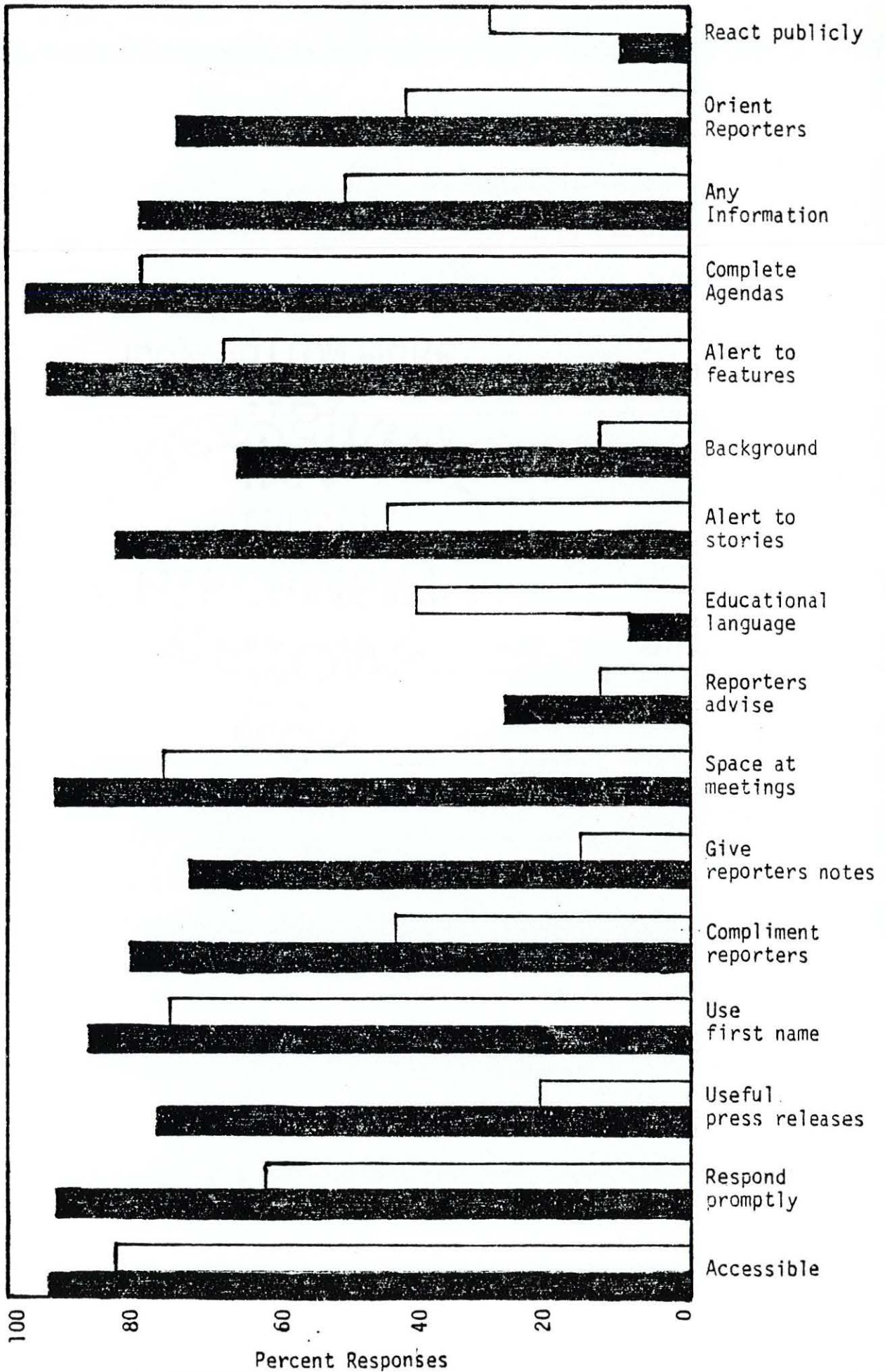
Practices	Percentage of Responses	
	Educators	Journalists
Use educational language in press releases or interviews	9%	40%
Ask to see a story before it is published	2%	4%
Alert reporters to important stories about to develop	84%	44%
Prepare background statements in advance on potentially controversial news stories	66%	13%
Alert reporters to possible feature stories	94%	68%
Give reporters complete agendas before board of education meetings	97%	80%
Give reporters any information they request about the district	80%	50%
Invite and orient reporters to district and school functions	75%	41%
React publicly to headlines and editorials	10%	29%

These data indicate that superintendents and public information officers say they are employing a number of practices which the literature indicates can produce negative results: 59 percent of the superintendents and public information officers are correcting errors which occur in stories; 38 percent talk off the record to reporters; 12 percent suggest how a story should be written; 9 percent of the superintendents and public information officers say they use educational language in press releases and interviews; 2 percent ask to see a story before it is published; and 10 percent of the

superintendents and public information officers say they react publicly to headlines and editorials. Journalists, on the other hand, state that the percentages of superintendents and public information officers employing negative practices are appreciably higher. The data also reveal that the educators tend to rank themselves higher on the positive practices than the journalists do.

Educators' and journalists' responses differed significantly on a number of practices. Using the chi square test of association with a level of significance of .05, the researcher found that educators' and journalists' responses differed to a statistically significant degree on the following practices: a) are accessible to reporters, b) respond promptly to reporters' inquiries, c) send out accurate and useful press releases, d) know reporters by first name, e) compliment reporters for stories, f) give notes to reporters unable to attend meetings, g) reserve space for reporters at board of education meetings, h) solicit reporters' advice about the district's public information program, i) use educational language in press releases, j) alert reporters to important stories about to develop, k) prepare background statements in advance on potentially controversial news stories, l) give reporters complete agendas before board of education meetings, m) alert reporters to possible feature stories, n) give reporters any information they request about the district, o) invite and orient reporters to district and school functions, and p) react publicly to headlines and editorials. Using a histogram, Figure 1 visually portrays the differences in responses between the perceptions of educators and journalists for those practices for which a statistically significant difference exists.

A Comparison of Educators' and Journalists' Responses Which Differ to a Statistically Significant Degree on Survey Items on District Public Information/Press Practices



An analysis of Figure 1 shows that significant differences exist between perceptions journalists and educators have about school districts' press practices. A complete statistical analysis of these data, as well as the level of significance, is included on pages 136 through 138 of Appendix E.

In conclusion, the study's second objective was to identify the school districts' public information practices. The data show that some districts employ practices which the literature deems as producing negative results in working with the press. The data further reveal significant differences of perception between educators and journalists about the public information practices districts utilize.

Treatment by the Press

According to the literature, educators frequently exhibit dissatisfaction with the way their district and/or education are treated by newspapers.

Objective 3. Identify the superintendents' and public information officers' perceptions of how the district is treated by the press.

Only educators were asked to respond to the six survey items dealing with this objective. Table 12 summarizes the educators' responses to these survey items.

Table 12

Educators' Responses to Survey Items on
Press Treatment of Their Districts

Survey Item	Percent Indicating Response				
	Positive			Negative	
How would you characterize newspaper stories about your district?	1 24%	2 58%	3 16%	4 2%	5 .1%
How much time or space does the press give your district?	Great 1 19%	2 42%	3 32%	4 6%	Little 5 1%
How does the press portray your district in stories?	Accurately 1 19%	2 61%	3 17%	Inaccurately 4 2%	5 1%
To what depth do reporters report stories about your district?	Comprehensively 1 11%	2 42%	3 39%	4 8%	Superficially 5 1%
What type of stories about your district are most often in the news?	Sensational 1 4%	2 10%	3 44%	4 40%	Human Interest 5 3%
How would you characterize news stories about your district?	Biased 1 4%	2 8%	3 26%	4 47%	Unbiased 5 16%

These data do not reveal a high degree of dissatisfaction among superintendents and public information officers about the way their district is treated by the press. Eighty-two percent of the educators characterize the news of their district as positive or relatively positive. Sixty-one percent of the educators believe their district receives a substantial amount of press coverage, while 80 percent believe their district is treated in an accurate or relatively accurate manner. Fifty-three percent of the educators indicated that stories about their district are comprehensive or fairly comprehensive. On the question about type of stories, 44 percent of the educators selected the mid-range between sensational and

human interest. Sixty-three percent of the educators indicated that news stories about their district were unbiased or fairly unbiased. Superintendents' and public information officers' responses to these items did not differ to a statistically significant degree. A complete statistical analysis of these data is on pages 139 and 140 of Appendix.E.

The study's third objective was to identify superintendents' and public information officers' perceptions of how their district is treated by the press. The data show that, to a large extent, they feel that newspaper stories about their district are generally positive, accurate, comprehensive, and unbiased. The data also show that superintendents and public information officers feel their district receives a substantial amount of newspaper coverage and that, in their perception, the stories range from sensational to human interest.

Press' Role

The press, according to the literature, feels very strongly about its role as public watchdog, advocate, and information source. In its role as public advocate, the press feels it has an obligation to evaluate, interpret, and criticize public institutions and figures.

Objective 4. Identify the superintendents' and public information officers' and editors' and education reporters' perceptions of the press' role in public education.

Both educators and journalists responded to the six items on the press' role in public education. Table 13 summarizes their responses.

Table 13

Educators' and Journalists' Responses to Survey Items on the Press' Role in Education

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Percent Indicating That Response				
		Agree 1	2	3	Disagree 4	5
The press should criticize education.	Educators	19%	31%	37%	10%	4%
	Journalists	64%	19%	8%	3%	6%
The press should only report on facts about actions of the district.	Educators	20%	19%	19%	23%	21%
	Journalists	14%	6%	2%	14%	63%
The press should judge actions of the district in editorials.	Educators	28%	34%	20%	10%	7%
	Journalists	84%	7%	4%	4%	0%
The press should evaluate results of district programs.	Educators	16%	25%	29%	11%	19%
	Journalists	76%	13%	9%	2%	0%
The press should provide a catalyst for school improvement.	Educators	13%	28%	30%	17%	12%
	Journalists	54%	12%	32%	2%	0%
The press should have no role in public education.	Educators	.8%	2%	10%	18%	70%
	Journalists	0%	0%	6%	8%	86%

These data reveal significant differences of perception between educators and journalists on the press' role in public education. The journalists indicate that the press' role is to criticize education, judge actions of the district in editorials, evaluate the results of district programs, and provide a catalyst for school improvement. No journalists indicated that the press should have no role in public education. On the other hand, the educators' perceptions about the press' role in education appear to be less clear. The data do not reveal a large percentage response to any one item, except that educators do apparently believe that the press does have a role in education, although not to the large extent that journalists do. The complete statistical analysis of these data is on pages 141 through 143 of Appendix E.

Superintendents and public information officers did not differ in their responses to a statistically significant degree; however, editors' and reporters' responses differed to a statistically significant degree on one item. On the item on whether or not the press should act as a catalyst for school improvement, editors' and reporters' responses differed significantly. Using the chi square test of association with a .05 level of significance, editors' and reporters' responses differed significantly. A greater percentage of editors than reporters strongly agree that the press should act as a catalyst for school improvement. Educators' and journalists' responses differed to a statistically significant level on all six of the survey items on the press' role in public education. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a significance level of .05 was used to analyze these differences. Table 14 reveals these differences.

Table 14

Statistical Significance Between Educators' and Journalists'
Responses to Survey Items on the Press' Role in Education

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Mean	F	p
The press should criticize education.	Journalists Educators	1.6984 2.4776	22.579	< .0001
The press should only report on facts about the actions of the district.	Journalists Educators	4.0484 3.0388	20.287	< .0001
The press should judge actions of the district in editorials.	Journalists Educators	1.2941 2.3284	42.762	< .0001
The press should evaluate results of district programs.	Journalists Educators	1.3582 2.9242	81.133	< .0001
The press should provide a catalyst for school improvement.	Journalists Educators	1.8154 2.8760	37.976	< .0001
The press should have no role in public education.	Journalists Educators	4.8000 4.5462	5.356	< .03

Analysis of these data reveals the highest level of agreement between educators and journalists on the item which states that the press should have no role in education, with journalists disagreeing with the statement to a higher degree than educators. The next highest level of agreement between educators and journalists is the statement that the press should report only on facts. The third highest level of agreement is on the item which states that the press should criticize education. The fourth highest level of agreement is on the statement that the press should act as a catalyst for school improvement. The next-to-lowest level of agreement between educators and journalists is on the statement that the press should judge district actions in editorials. Finally, the lowest level of agreement is the item which states that the press should evaluate results of district programs.

In summary, the data for the study's objective dealing with the press' role in public education reveal statistically significant differences between educators' and journalists' perceptions of the press' role. To a large extent, journalists believe the press' role is to criticize education, judge district actions, evaluate district programs, and provide a catalyst for educational improvement. Educators appear not to have a clear perception of the press' role in public education, although the majority of educators indicated that the press does have a role.

Public Information Efforts

The literature contains little evaluation of school districts' public information efforts. Therefore, one of the objectives of

this study was to have the press evaluate districts' public information programs.

Objective 5. Evaluate, as perceived by the press,
school districts' public information efforts.

Editors and education reporters responded to six survey items dealing with this objective. Table 15 summarizes their responses on Likert-type items.

Table 15

Journalists' Responses to Survey Items
on Districts' Public Information Efforts

Survey Item	Percent Indicating Response				
	Successful		Unsuccessful		
How would you characterize the public information efforts of the large districts in your area?	1 9%	2 38%	3 32%	4 19%	5 2%
How much time, effort and money do the districts in your area appear to give to their public information programs?	Great			Little	
	1 4%	2 27%	3 37%	4 29%	5 3%
An effective public information program can aid a district in getting good press.	Agree			Disagree	
	1 41%	2 40%	3 10%	4 4%	5 4%
Most school district administrators do not know how to work effectively with reporters.	Agree			Disagree	
	1 22%	2 22%	3 36%	4 12%	5 8%

These data indicate that journalists find districts' public information efforts moderately successful; that they believe that districts do not spend a great amount of time, money, or effort on their public information efforts; that an effective public information program can aid districts in getting good press; and that some school administrators do not know how to work with reporters.

Editors and reporters also indicated the reasons why the public information practices in school districts were unsuccessful. Table 16 indicates their responses.

Table 16

Journalists' Responses to Survey Item on
the Reasons Public Information Programs Are Unsuccessful

Survey Item	Percent Indicating As A Reason
Too many meaningless press releases	27%
Copy which does not adhere to our format	4%
Lack of clearly defined public information policies/procedures	21%
Lack of access to administrators	15%
Hostile and emotional administrators	10%
Lack of access to information	31%
Lack of current information	24%
Failure to give adequate background information	21%

With the exception of poor copy, all of the other reasons appear to be of fairly comparable importance as reasons why district public information programs are unsuccessful.

Journalists also indicated the reasons why some school district public information programs are successful. Table 17 indicates their responses to this item.

Table 17

Journalists' Response to Survey Item on the
Reasons Public Information Programs are Successful

Survey Item	Percent Indicating As A Reason
Good press releases	28%
Copy which adheres to our format	9%
Clearly defined public information policies/procedures	16%
Access to administrators	69%
Congenial, helpful administrators	49%
Access to information	59%
Current information available	50%
Adequate background information	35%

These data reveal that the most significant reasons some districts' public information programs are successful are as follows: access to administrators, access to information, current information available, congenial and helpful administrators, adequate background information, and good press releases.

Editors' and reporters' responses to items on evaluation of school district public information programs differed to a statistically significant level on only one item: most school district administrators do not know how to work effectively with reporters. Using the chi square test of association with a .05 level of significance, editors' and reporters' responses differed significantly. A greater percentage of editors than reporters agree that most

school district administrators do not know how to work with reporters. The statistical analyses of Tables 15 through 17 are on pages 144 through 147 of Appendix E.

In summary, the data show that journalists find school district public information programs moderately successful, that the districts do not expend a great deal of effort on their public information programs, that an effective public information program can aid a district in getting good press, and that some administrators do not know how to work with reporters. When asked the reason some districts' public information programs were unsuccessful, the journalists cited the following: too many meaningless press releases, lack of clearly defined public information policies/procedures, lack of access to information, lack of current information, and failure to give adequate background information. When asked the reason some districts' public information programs were successful, the journalists cited the following factors as the main reasons for their success: access to administrators and information, current information available, helpful administrators, adequate background information, and good press releases.

Working Relationship

The literature suggests that the working relationship between educators and journalists is an uneasy one and frequently adversarial. One of the study's objectives addressed that relationship.

Objective 6. Identify the superintendents' and public information officers' and editors' and education reporters' perceptions of their working relationship.

Journalists and educators both responded to the survey items on working relationships. Their responses are summarized in Tables 18 through 21.

Table 18

Educators' and Journalists' Responses to Likert-type Survey Items on Working Relationships

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Percent Indicating Response				
		Harmonious 1	2	3	Adversarial 4	5
How would you characterize your working relationship with the press (large school districts in your area)?	Educators	55%	33%	8%	3%	2%
	Journalists	21%	46%	22%	10%	0%
Can the school district and the press work together harmoniously?	Educators	Seldom 1	2	3	Frequently 4	5
	Journalists	2%	4%	7%	40%	47%
		2%	8%	22%	47%	22%

These data reveal lack of agreement between educators and journalists. Although both groups characterize their working relationship as more harmonious than adversarial, the level of their agreement differs. In addition, the two groups indicate that the press and school districts can work together harmoniously; however, the level of agreement differs between the two groups. A complete breakdown of group responses is included on pages 148 and 149 of Appendix E.

No statistically significant differences exist in the responses within the educator and the journalist groups; however, statistically significant differences do exist between educators and journalists. Table 19 reveals the degree of differences in educators' and journalists' responses. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a significance level of .05 was used to analyze the differences.

Table 19

Statistical Significance Between Educators' and Journalists' Responses on Survey Items on Working Relationships

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Mean	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
How would you characterize your working relationship?	Educators	1.6269	20.709	< .0001
	Journalists	2.2239		
Can the school district and the press work together harmoniously?	Educator	4.2667	11.415	< .001
	Journalist	3.8088		

These data reveal statistically significant differences in perception of their working relationship between educators and journalists.

More educators than journalists characterize their working relationship as leaning toward harmonious, rather than adversarial. Educators also believe, to a greater extent than journalists, that the school district and the press can work together harmoniously.

Both educators and journalists were asked which factors hurt the working relationship between school districts and the press. They were given a choice of six factors and asked to indicate as many factors as were applicable. Table 20 summarizes their responses.

Table 20

Educators' and Journalists' Responses to Survey Item
on Factors Hurting Their Working Relationship

Factor	Percentage of Educators Responding	Percentage of Journalists Responding
Uncooperative administrators	44%	69%
Aggressive reporters	48%	27%
Educators' lack of knowledge about newspapers' procedures	53%	52%
Differing aims and goals of the two institutions	68%	60%
Press' interest in the sensational and the immediate	49%	24%
Lack of candor	30%	62%

These data show relative agreement between educators and journalists on only two factors which hurt their working relationship: educators' lack of knowledge about newspaper procedures and the differing aims and goals of the two institutions. The two groups differ

markedly in their perceptions of the other four factors which can hurt the school districts' and the press' working relationship.

Within the journalists' group, editors and reporters disagree to a statistically significant level about two factors which hurt the working relationship, and superintendents and public information officers disagree about one factor. The chi square test of association with a significance level of .05 was used to analyze the data. On both the factor of uncooperative administrators and the factor of aggressive reporters, significant differences were indicated. A greater percentage of editors than reporters believe that uncooperative administrators and aggressive reporters hurt the working relationship. Superintendents and public information officers disagree significantly about lack of candor, with a greater percentage of superintendents than public information officers citing it as a factor. Differences within groups are shown on page 150 of Appendix E.

Differences between groups--educators and journalists--occur to a statistically significant degree on four factors. The chi square test of association with a significance level of .05 was used to ascertain the degree of disagreement. The four factors are: uncooperative administrators, aggressive reporters, press interest in the sensational and the immediate, and lack of candor. A greater percentage of journalists than educators believe uncooperative administrators and lack of candor hurt the working relationship, while a greater percentage of educators than journalists believe aggressive reporters and the press' interest in the sensational hurt the working relationship. The greatest degree of difference is about lack of candor, and the smallest degree of difference is about aggressive

reporters. A complete statistical analysis of Table 20 is included on page 151 of Appendix E.

Both educators and journalists were also asked to characterize the nature of their working relationship with each other. Ten characteristics were listed, and journalists and educators were asked to check as many of the characteristics as applied to their working relationship with each other. Table 21 summarizes their responses to this item.

Table 21
Educators' and Journalists' Responses to
Survey Item Characterizing Their Working Relationship

Characteristic	Percentage of Educators Responding	Percentage of Journalists Responding
Harmonious	84%	56%
Ambiguous	2%	16%
Supportive	58%	12%
Trusting	47%	25%
Cooperative	87%	68%
Adversarial	4%	12%
Clear	33%	22%
Divisive	1%	2%
Wary	16%	34%
Uncooperative	2%	3%

These data imply that educators would characterize their working relationship with the press as harmonious, supportive, trusting, cooperative, and clear. Journalists, on the other hand,

would characterize their working relationship with school districts as harmonious, cooperative, and wary. Both groups characterize their working relationship as harmonious and cooperative.

The chi square test of association with a level of significance of .05 was used to analyze differences in responses. Within groups, editors and education reporters disagree to a statistically significant level on two characteristics: trusting and wary. A greater percentage of reporters than editors characterize the relationship as trusting, and a greater percentage of editors than reporters characterize the relationship as wary. No statistically significant differences in responses were found between superintendents and public information officers. Between the educators' and journalists' groups, significant differences occur in seven of the ten characteristics: harmonious, ambiguous, supportive, trusting, cooperative, adversarial, and wary. A greater percentage of journalists than educators characterize the working relationship as ambiguous, adversarial, and wary while a greater percentage of educators than journalists characterize the relationship as harmonious, supportive, trusting, and cooperative. The two groups disagree to the greatest extent about the characteristics harmonious and supportive. A complete statistical analysis of these data indicating levels of significance is on pages 152 and 153 of Appendix E.

The study's final objective was to identify the press' and districts' perception of their working relationship. The data imply that both educators and journalists view their working relationship as more harmonious than adversarial and that the two institutions can work together harmoniously; educators, however, agree with these statements to a greater extent than journalists do. Educators

and journalists disagree about the factors which hurt their working relationship and disagree about terms they would use to characterize their working relationship.

Respondents' Comments

Both educators and journalists were given the opportunity to write in responses to a number of items. A greater percentage of journalists than educators availed themselves of this opportunity. The comments are in Appendix F; however, a brief summary of the types of responses is presented in Table 22.

Table 22

A Summary of Educators' and Journalists' Responses
to Survey Items Asking for Comments

Survey Item	Typical Responses
Comments - Educators' feelings about press coverage and the role of the press	Constructive criticism Shallow stories Press not to judge or evaluate Press should inform Press is important
Comments - Journalists' feelings about district press efforts and press' role	Disorganized public relations efforts Paper is not a mouthpiece for schools Accessible PIO helps Press criticizes and evaluates
Factors which hurt working relationship - educators	Changes in reporters Reporters' lack of knowledge and experience

Table 22 (continued)

Survey Item	Typical Responses
Factors which hurt working relationship - educators	Fear Inaccurate reporting Lack of space in paper
Factors which hurt working relationship - journalists	School administrators' fear Inaccessible administrators Poor public relations person Too many closed sessions
Educators' advice to the press on improving working relationship	Gain knowledge about district Do your homework More space and time to positive news Follow-up on stories Understand our problems Be accurate and objective Don't sensationalize Spend time in the schools Develop trust Balance news Have more in-depth stories
Journalists' advice to educators on improving working relationship	Be honest, open, and candid Talk to us Get a public information officer Be upfront in adversity Cooperate with us

Table 22 (continued)

Survey Item	Typical Responses
Journalists' advice to educators on improving working relationship	Speak and write simple English
	Be accessible
	Understand how the press functions
	Suggest feature stories
	Recognize the public's right to know
	Get to know newspaper people
	Disseminate more information
	Return telephone calls

Many of the educators' and journalists' narrative comments support the statistical findings of the study. Their comments also support the theories and practices described in the literature review.

Summary

The data reveal that a majority of the large school districts do have public information policies and procedures, that in most cases the press is aware of the policy, and that most large school districts do have someone responsible for public information and working with the press. The data also indicate that some school districts employ negative practices when working with the press and that journalists' and educators' perceptions about the public information practices districts employ differ significantly; educators tend to rank themselves higher on positive practices than journalists

do. In addition, the data imply that educators are relatively well-satisfied with the press treatment their district receives. However, the data indicate significant differences between educators and journalists about the press' role in public education. The data also suggest that journalists find districts' public information efforts moderately successful. Finally, the data indicate that educators and journalists view their working relationship as more harmonious than adversarial; however, they disagree about the factors which hurt their working relationship, as well as disagreeing on how they would characterize their working relationship. Journalists cite uncooperative administrators and lack of candor as factors which hurt the working relationship, while educators cite aggressive reporters and the press' interest in the sensational; in addition, a greater percentage of journalists than educators characterize the relationship as ambiguous, adversarial, and wary while a greater percentage of educators characterize it as harmonious, supportive, trusting, and cooperative.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The press and public schools have a number of similarities. Both were of major concern to the framers of the United States Constitution. Both are generally of major significance in any community. Both are heavily dependent on language as their main vehicle of communication. Both are public entities, one supported by public monies and the other by private. Yet despite these similarities the relationship between the two institutions is frequently uneasy, often adversarial. School districts are bureaucracies who use public funds to deliver services to the citizens; the press considers itself a watchdog over how these services are delivered and how the funds expended. It considers itself an advocate for the citizens. This public advocacy role of the press can bring it into conflict with school districts.

The main purpose of this study was to clarify and analyze the relationship between large school districts and the press in California. In an attempt to provide this clarification and analysis, this study had six objectives relating to school district public information policies and procedures, school district public information practices, educators' perceptions of press treatment, the press' role in public education, evaluation of school district public information efforts, and educators' and journalists' perceptions about their working relationship. Survey research methods were used to gather the data about school district/press relationships.

Summary of the Findings

Data gathered for this study produced the following findings:

1. Fifty-nine percent of the superintendents and public information officers say that their district has a specific public information/press policy and that the press is aware of the policy in 82 percent of those districts.
2. Sixty-nine percent of the superintendents and public information officers state that their district has a public information officer; that he has a staff in 64 percent of those districts; and that he has a budget, exclusive of salaries, in 83 percent of those districts. In those districts that have public information officers, 84 percent of the superintendents and public information officers state that he reports directly to the superintendent, and 67 percent report that he is part of the superintendent's staff or council.
3. Sixty-seven percent of the superintendents and public information officers say that their district has specific procedures for working with the press.
4. Educators and journalists disagree about whom reporters first contact for news in a district; educators say reporters first contact the public information officer, while journalists say reporters' first district contact varies from district to district.
5. Educators and journalists also disagree about the type of training and education the public information officer should have; educators favor a public relations background while journalists favor a journalism background.

6. Significant differences exist between educators and journalists about the negative public information/press practices school districts employ. A greater percentage of journalists than educators believe that district personnel employ negative public information/press practices, such as correcting errors in stories and talking off the record to reporters.

7. Significant differences also exist between educators and journalists about the positive public information/press practices school districts employ. Educators tend to rank themselves higher on the positive practices than journalists do. Educators and journalists disagree to a statistically significant level on sixteen public information/press practices.

8. Educators appear to be relatively satisfied with the treatment their districts receive by the press. Eighty-two percent of the educators characterize press treatment of their district as relatively positive while 80 percent believe stories about their district are relatively accurate. Sixty-one percent believe their district receives a substantial amount of press coverage while 53 percent of the educators indicate that stories about their district are fairly comprehensive. Sixty-three percent indicate news stories about their district are fairly unbiased.

9. Educators and journalists do not agree about the role of the press in public education. Journalists believe the press' role is to criticize education, judge district actions, evaluate district programs, and provide a catalyst for educational improvement. Educators, on the other hand, do not appear to have a clear perception

of the press' role. Educators' and journalists' responses to items on the press' role differed to a statistically significant level on all items.

10. Journalists characterize school districts' public information efforts as moderately successful, and they believe that districts do not spend a great deal of time, money, or effort on their public information programs. Eighty-one percent of the journalists believe an effective public information program can aid a district in getting good press.

11. The reasons that districts' public information programs are successful are access to administrators and information, availability of current information, helpful administrators, adequate background information, and good press releases.

12. Although both educators and journalists characterize their working relationship as more harmonious than adversarial, their perceptions differ to a statistically significant degree. More educators than journalists characterize their working relationship as harmonious; to a greater extent than journalists, educators also believe that their working relationship can be harmonious.

13. Educators and journalists also disagree to a statistically significant level about the factors which hurt their working relationship. Forty-eight percent of the educators cite aggressive reporters as a factor, and 49 percent cite the press' interest in the sensational and immediate. Sixty-nine percent of the journalists cite uncooperative administrators as a factor, and 62 percent cite lack of candor as a factor. Educators and journalists agree,

however, that the differing aims and goals of the two institutions hurt their working relationship.

14. Educators and journalists also disagree to a statistically significant level about the terms they would use to characterize their working relationship. Educators characterize their relationship as harmonious, supportive, trusting, cooperative, and clear. Journalists, on the other hand, characterize their relationship as harmonious, cooperative, and wary.

Conclusions

The researcher came to a number of conclusions as a result of this study. In many cases, the results of the study supported the literature on school district/press relationships; in one case the study did not support the literature.

The literature recommends that the first step a district take in an effort to improve its press coverage is to develop and implement public information/press policies and procedures. Yet, 41 percent of the superintendents and public information officers state that their district does not have such policies and procedures. The literature further recommends hiring a public information officer who is responsible to the superintendent for implementing the public information/press policies and procedures. However, 17 percent of the districts apparently do not have a public information officer either full- or part-time. School districts who wish to improve their press coverage should develop public information/press policies and hire a public information officer to implement them.

According to the literature, school districts should employ certain positive public information/press practices and not utilize certain negative practices. The data collected for this study indicate that some districts do employ the negative practices, and the districts who do utilize the positive practices are not perceived by the press as employing them as frequently as educators say they do. Clearly, educators need to learn what the negative practices are and then not utilize them; in addition, educators perhaps need to apply the positive practices more frequently and consistently.

The literature suggests that many educators view press coverage of their district as negative, infrequent, inaccurate, superficial, sensational, and biased. The data collected for this study do not support the literature. California superintendents and public information officers do not find press coverage of their districts as negative as the literature suggests other educators do.

This study suggests that superintendents and public information officers do not have a clear perception of the press' role in education. As a step toward improving their relationship with journalists, educators should try to understand the press' role and function. With understanding of the press' role, educators will be less apt to make mistakes in their dealings with journalists.

According to journalists, some districts have successful public information programs because of the following factors: access to administrators and information, current information available, helpful administrators, adequate background information,

and good press releases. Districts desiring to improve their press coverage should develop public information/press procedures which incorporate these factors.

In summary, districts which wish to improve their working relationship with the press and improve their press coverage should develop and implement public information policies and procedures, hire a public information officer, consistently utilize positive rather than negative press practices, and try to understand and accept the press' public advocacy role in education.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study was limited to analyzing public school district/press relationships in California. Large school districts (over ten thousand average daily attendance) and daily newspapers in the cities in which those districts are located were analyzed. Only newspapers printed in English were analyzed. No attempt was made to analyze a particular district and the newspaper(s) which covers it. Survey research methods were used.

Further study could be done on the following:

1. All school districts, regardless of size, and all newspapers--whether daily, weekly, monthly or printed in languages other than English--in California could be analyzed to broaden the knowledge on school district/press relationships.

2. The research could be expanded to include other media, such as television and radio, to broaden the knowledge on school district/press relationships.

3. The relationship between newspapers and private schools could be analyzed to identify differences and similarities of school district/press relationships between private and public schools.

4. Interviews could be conducted with superintendents, public information officers, editors, and education reporters to ascertain why such statistically significant differences exist in the areas of public information/press practices, the press' role in education, and working relationships.

5. Interviews could be conducted with superintendents and public information officers to ascertain why they appear more satisfied with their press coverage than the literature suggests they might.

Summary

School districts and newspapers are major community institutions whose differing aims and goals frequently bring them into apparent conflict with each other. Educators sometimes react emotionally when these differing aims and goals result in a newspaper story which they perceive as portraying them or their district in a negative aspect. However, despite this perception and differing aims and goals, the two institutions need not be incompatible and isolated from each other. The literature suggests procedures and practices which districts can employ to improve their working relationship with the press; it also suggests that the responsibility for initiating these procedures and practices lies with educators.

This study analyzed the relationship between school districts and newspapers in California. This study suggests that educators need to be more effective in utilizing positive public information/press practices. It also suggests that educators have no clear concept of the role of the press in education and that the relationship between school districts and newspapers is not easily or clearly defined. It further suggests that educators and journalists do not agree about the factors which hinder their working relationship. Finally, this study suggests that districts desiring to improve their working relationship with the press employ the practices and procedures suggested in the literature review. No policies, procedures, or practices will guarantee all positive newspaper stories; however, districts which make no effort to understand the press' role in education or no effort to implement policies, procedures, and practices which enable the press to perform its function have no one but themselves to blame for consistently negative press coverage.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEYS

SURVEY ON SCHOOL DISTRICT/PRESS RELATIONSHIPS

109

Circle the number which best expresses your feelings:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. How would you characterize newspaper stories about your district? | Positive
1 2 3 4 5 | Negative |
| 2. How much space or time does the press give your district? | Great
1 2 3 4 5 | Little |
| 3. How does the press portray your district in stories? | Accurately
1 2 3 4 5 | Inaccurately |
| 4. To what depth do reporters report stories about your district? | Comprehensively
1 2 3 4 5 | Superficially |
| 5. What type of stories about your district are most often in the news? | Sensational
1 2 3 4 5 | Human Interest |
| 6. How would you characterize news stories about your district? | Biased
1 2 3 4 5 | Unbiased |
| 7. How would you characterize your working relationship with the press? | Harmonious
1 2 3 4 5 | Adversarial |
| 8. Can the school district and the press work together harmoniously? | Seldom
1 2 3 4 5 | Frequently |
| 9. The press should criticize education. | Agree
1 2 3 4 5 | Disagree |
| 10. The press should only report on facts about the actions of the district. | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| 11. The press should judge actions of the district in editorials. | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| 12. The press should evaluate results of district programs. | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| 13. The press should provide a catalyst for school improvement. | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| 14. The press should have no role in public education. | 1 2 3 4 5 | |

15. Comments (Items 1 - 14) _____

16. What are the factors which hurt the working relationship between the school district and the press? (Check as many as applicable.)

- a. ☐ Uncooperative administrators
- b. ☐ Aggressive reporters
- c. ☐ Educators' lack of knowledge about press procedures
- d. ☐ Press' interest in the sensational and the immediate
- e. ☐ Differing aims and goals of the two institutions
- f. ☐ Lack of candor
- g. ☐ Other (specify) _____

17. Which of the following terms best describes your working relationship with the local press personnel? (Check as many as applicable.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonious | f. <input type="checkbox"/> Adversarial |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> Ambiguous | g. <input type="checkbox"/> Clear |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/> Supportive | h. <input type="checkbox"/> Divisive |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/> Trusting | i. <input type="checkbox"/> Wary |
| e. <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative | j. <input type="checkbox"/> Uncooperative |

18. Check the practices listed below which the administrative staff in the district employ.

- a. ☐ Are accessible to reporters
- b. ☐ Correct errors in facts which occur in stories
- c. ☐ Give reporters staff home telephone numbers
- d. ☐ Respond promptly to reporters' inquiries
- e. ☐ Send out accurate and useful press releases
- f. ☐ Know reporters by first names
- g. ☐ Talk off the record to reporters
- h. ☐ Suggest how a story should be written
- i. ☐ Compliment reporters for stories
- j. ☐ Give notes to reporters unable to attend meetings
- k. ☐ Reserve space for reporters at board of education meetings
- l. ☐ Solicit reporter's advice about the district's public information program
- m. ☐ Use educational language in press releases or interviews
- n. ☐ Ask to see a story before it is published
- o. ☐ Alert reporters to important stories about to develop
- p. ☐ Prepare background statements in advance on potentially controversial news stories
- q. ☐ Alert reporters to possible feature stories
- r. ☐ Give reporters complete agendas before board of education meetings
- s. ☐ Give reporters any information they request about the district
- t. ☐ Invite and orient reporters to district and school functions
- u. ☐ React publicly to headlines and editorials

19. If you were to tell the press how to improve its relationship with the school district, what would you say? _____

☐ Yes, I would like a copy of the results of this study.

SURVEY ON PRESS/SCHOOL DISTRICT RELATIONSHIPS

111

Circle the number which best expresses your feelings:

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. How would you characterize the public information efforts of the large districts in your area? | Successful
1 2 3 | Unsuccessful
4 5 |
| 2. How much time, effort and money do the districts in your area appear to give to their public information programs? | Great
1 2 3 | Little
4 5 |
| 3. How would you characterize your working relationship with the large school districts in your area? | Harmonious
1 2 3 | Adversarial
4 5 |
| 4. Can the school district and the press work together harmoniously? | Seldom
1 2 3 | Frequently
4 5 |
| 5. The press should criticize education. | Agree
1 2 3 | Disagree
4 5 |
| 6. The press should only report on facts about the actions of the district. | 1 2 3 | 4 5 |
| 7. The press should judge actions of the district in editorials. | 1 2 3 | 4 5 |
| 8. The press should evaluate results of district programs. | 1 2 3 | 4 5 |
| 9. The press should provide a catalyst for school improvement. | 1 2 3 | 4 5 |
| 10. The press should have no role in public education. | 1 2 3 | 4 5 |
| 11. An effective public information program can aid a district in getting good press. | 1 2 3 | 4 5 |
| 12. Most school district administrators do not know how to work effectively with reporters. | 1 2 3 | 4 5 |
| 13. Comments (Items 1 - 12): _____ | | |
| 14. If the public information procedures/practices of the large school district in your area are unsuccessful, why is this so? (Check as many as applicable.) | | |
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> Too many meaningless press releases | | |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> Copy which does not adhere to our format | | |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of clearly defined public information policies/procedures | | |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of access to administrators | | |
| e. <input type="checkbox"/> Hostile and/or emotional administrators | | |
| f. <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of access to information | | |
| g. <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of current information | | |
| h. <input type="checkbox"/> Failure to give adequate background information | | |
| i. <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ | | |
| 15. If the public information procedures/practices of the large school district in your area are successful, why is this so? (Check as many as applicable.) | | |
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> Good press releases | | |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> Copy which adheres to our format | | |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly defined public information policies/procedures | | |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/> Access to administrators | | |
| e. <input type="checkbox"/> Congenial, helpful administrators | | |
| f. <input type="checkbox"/> Access to information | | |
| g. <input type="checkbox"/> Current information available | | |
| h. <input type="checkbox"/> Adequate background information | | |
| i. <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ | | |

16. What are the factors which hurt the working relationship between the school district and the press? (Check as many as applicable.)

- a. ☐ Uncooperative administrators
- b. ☐ Aggressive reporters
- c. ☐ Educators' lack of knowledge about media procedures
- d. ☐ Differing aims and goals of the two institutions
- e. ☐ Press' interest in the sensational and the immediate
- f. ☐ Lack of candor
- g. ☐ Other (Specify) _____

17. Which of the following terms best describes your working relationship with the school district superintendent and PIO? (Check as many as applicable.)

- a. ☐ Harmonious
- b. ☐ Ambiguous
- c. ☐ Supportive
- d. ☐ Trusting
- e. ☐ Cooperative
- f. ☐ Adversarial
- g. ☐ Clear
- h. ☐ Divisive
- i. ☐ Wary
- j. ☐ Uncooperative

18. Check the practices listed below which the administrative staff in the large school districts in your area do, those they should do and those they should not do. (Some practices may be checked in two columns.)

Do	Should Do	Should Not Do	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are accessible to reporters
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Correct errors in facts which occur in stories
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Give reporters staff home telephone numbers
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Respond promptly to reporter's inquiries
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Send out accurate and useful press releases
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Know reporters by first names
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Talk off the record to reporters
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Suggest how a story should be written
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Compliment reporters for stories
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Give notes to reporters unable to attend meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reserve space for reporters at board of education meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Solicit reporter's advice about the district's public information program
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Use educational language in press releases or interviews
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask to see a story before it is published
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Alert reporters to important stories about to develop
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prepare background statements in advance on potentially controversial news stories
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Alert reporters to possible feature stories
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Give reporters complete agendas before board of education meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Give reporters any information they request about the district
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Invite and orient reporters to district and school functions
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	React publicly to headlines and editorials

19. If you were to tell a school district how to improve its relationship with the press, what would you say? _____

☐ Yes, I would like a copy of the results of this study.

EDUCATORS' SURVEY INSTRUMENT

SURVEY ON SCHOOL DISTRICT/PRESS RELATIONSHIPS

113

Check the response which applies to your district:

Yes No

1. Does your district have a specific public information/press policy? ___ ___
2. If yes, are the newspaper personnel aware of your policy? ___ ___
3. Does your district have a Public Information Officer (PIO) or its equivalent? ___ ___
___ Full Time ___ Part Time
4. If yes, does the PIO Have a staff? ___ ___
___ 1 - 3 People ___ 4 - 7 People ___ Over 8 People
5. Does the PIO have a budget, exclusive of salaries? ___ ___
___ Under \$5,000 ___ \$5,000 - \$9,999
___ \$10,000 - \$14,999 ___ \$15,000+
6. Does the PIO report directly to the superintendent? ___ ___
7. Is the PIO part of the superintendent's executive staff or council? ___ ___
8. Does your district have specific procedures for working with the press? ___ ___
9. Whom do the press personnel first contact for news in your district? ___ ___
___ Superintendent ___ PIO ___ Any Administrator
10. What type of training and education should the PIO have? ___ ___
___ Journalism ___ Public Relations ___ Teaching or Administrative

Circle the number which best expresses your feelings:

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|---|---|----------------|---|---|
| 11. How would you characterize newspaper stories about your district? | Positive | 1 | 2 | 3 | Negative | 4 | 5 |
| 12. How much space or time does the press give your district? | Great | 1 | 2 | 3 | Little | 4 | 5 |
| 13. How does the press portray your district in stories? | Accurately | 1 | 2 | 3 | Inaccurately | 4 | 5 |
| 14. To what depth do reporters report stories about your district? | Comprehensively | 1 | 2 | 3 | Superficially | 4 | 5 |
| 15. What type of stories about your district are most often in the news? | Sensational | 1 | 2 | 3 | Human Interest | 4 | 5 |
| 16. How would you characterize news stories about your district? | Biased | 1 | 2 | 3 | Unbiased | 4 | 5 |
| 17. How would you characterize your working relationship with the press? | Harmonious | 1 | 2 | 3 | Adversarial | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Can the school district and the press work together harmoniously? | Seldom | 1 | 2 | 3 | Frequently | 4 | 5 |
| 19. The press should criticize education. | Agree | 1 | 2 | 3 | Disagree | 4 | 5 |
| 20. The press should only report on facts about the actions of the district | | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 |
| 21. The press should judge actions of the district in editorials. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 |
| 22. The press should evaluate results of district programs. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 |
| 23. The press should provide a catalyst for school improvement. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 |
| 24. The press should have no role in public education. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Comments (Items 11 - 24) _____ | | | | | | | |

(Over)

26. What are the factors which hurt the working relationship between the school district and the press? (Check as many as applicable.)

☐ Uncooperative administrators
☐ Aggressive reporters
☐ Educators' lack of knowledge about press procedures
☐ Press' interest in the sensational and the immediate
☐ Differing aims and goals of the two institutions
☐ Lack of candor
☐ Other (Specify) _____

27. Which of the following terms best describes your working relationship with the local press personnel? (Check as many as applicable.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Harmonious	<input type="checkbox"/> Adversarial
<input type="checkbox"/> Ambiguous	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear
<input type="checkbox"/> Supportive	<input type="checkbox"/> Divisive
<input type="checkbox"/> Trusting	<input type="checkbox"/> Wary
<input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative	<input type="checkbox"/> Uncooperative

28. Check the practices listed below which the administrative staff in the district employ.

☐ Are accessible to reporters
☐ Correct errors in facts which occur in stories
☐ Give reporters staff home telephone numbers
☐ Respond promptly to reporters' inquiries
☐ Send out accurate and useful press releases

☐ Know reporters by first names
☐ Talk off the record to reporters
☐ Suggest how a story should be written
☐ Compliment reporters for stories
☐ Give notes to reporters unable to attend meetings

☐ Reserve space for reporters at board of education meetings
☐ Solicit reporter's advice about the district's public information program
☐ Use educational language in press releases or interviews
☐ Ask to see a story before it is published
☐ Alert reporters to important stories about to develop

☐ Prepare background statements in advance on potentially controversial news stories
☐ Alert reporters to possible feature stories
☐ Give reporters complete agendas before board of education meetings
☐ Give reporters any information they request about the district
☐ Invite and orient reporters to district and school functions
☐ React publicly to headlines and editorials

29. If you were to tell the press how to improve its relationship with the school district, what would you say? _____
- _____
- _____

☐ Yes, I would like a copy of the results of this study.

JOURNALISTS' SURVEY INSTRUMENT

SURVEY ON PRESS/SCHOOL DISTRICT RELATIONSHIPS

115

Check the response which applies to you:

Yes No

1. Do the large school districts in your area have specific public information/press policies? ___ ___
2. Do you have specific reporters assigned to cover the school districts in your area? ___ ___
3. Whom do your reporters first contact for stories on the school districts in your area?
 ___ Superintendent ___ PIO ___ Any Administrator ___ Varies from District to District
4. What type of training and education should the PIO have?
 ___ Journalism ___ Public Relations ___ Teaching or Administrative

Circle the number which best expresses your feelings:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 5. How would you characterize the public information efforts of the large districts in your area? | Successful
1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. How much time, effort and money do the districts in your area appear to give to their public information programs? | Great
1 2 3 4 5 Little |
| 7. How would you characterize your working relationship with the large school districts in your area? | Harmonious
1 2 3 4 5 Adversarial |
| 8. Can the school district and the press work together harmoniously? | Seldom
1 2 3 4 5 Frequently |
| 9. The press should criticize education. | Agree
1 2 3 4 5 Disagree |
| 10. The press should only report on facts about the actions of the district. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. The press should judge actions of the district in editorials. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. The press should evaluate results of district programs. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. The press should provide a catalyst for school improvement. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. The press should have no role in public education. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. An effective public information program can aid a district in getting good press. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. Most school district administrators do not know how to work effectively with reporters. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. Comments (Items 5 - 16): | _____ |

18. If the public information procedures/practices of the large school districts in your area are unsuccessful, why is this so? (Check as many as applicable.)

- ☐ Too many meaningless press releases
☐ Copy which does not adhere to our format
☐ Lack of clearly defined public information policies/procedures
☐ Lack of access to administrators
☐ Hostile and/or emotional administrators
☐ Lack of access to information
☐ Lack of current information
☐ Failure to give adequate background information
☐ Other (Specify) _____

19. If the public information procedures/practices of the large school district in your area are successful, why is this so? (Check as many as applicable.)

- ☐ Good press releases
☐ Copy which adheres to our format
☐ Clearly defined public information policies/procedures
☐ Access to administrators
☐ Congenial, helpful administrators
☐ Access to information
☐ Current information available
☐ Adequate background information
☐ Other (Specify) _____

(Over)

20. What are the factors which hurt the working relationship between the school district and the press? (Check as many as applicable.)

☐ Uncooperative administrators
☐ Aggressive reporters
☐ Educators' lack of knowledge about media procedures
☐ Differing aims and goals of the two institutions
☐ Press' interest in the sensational and the immediate
☐ Lack of candor
☐ Other (Specify) _____

21. Which of the following terms best describes your working relationship with the school district's superintendent and PIO? (Check as many as applicable.)

☐ Harmonious ☐ Adversarial
☐ Ambiguous ☐ Clear
☐ Supportive ☐ Divisive
☐ Trusting ☐ Wary
☐ Cooperative ☐ Uncooperative

22. Check the practices listed below which the administrative staff in the large school districts in your area employ in their dealings with you.

☐ Are accessible to reporters
☐ Correct errors in facts which occur in stories
☐ Give reporters staff home telephone numbers
☐ Respond promptly to reporter's inquiries
☐ Send out accurate and useful press releases

☐ Know reporters by first names
☐ Talk off the record with reporters
☐ Suggest how a story should be written
☐ Compliment reporters for stories
☐ Give notes to reporters unable to attend meetings

☐ Reserve space for reporters at board of education meetings
☐ Solicit reporter's advice about the district's public information program
☐ Use educational language in press releases or interviews
☐ Ask to see a story before it is published
☐ Alert reporters to important stories about to develop

☐ Prepare background statements in advance on potentially controversial news stories
☐ Alert reporters to possible feature stories
☐ Give reporters complete agendas before board of education meetings
☐ Give reporters any information they request about the district
☐ Invite and orient reporters to district and school functions
☐ React publicly to headlines and editorials

23. If you were to tell a school district how to improve its relationship with the press, what would you say? _____
- _____
- _____

☐ Yes, I would like a copy of the results of this study.

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTERS FOR SURVEYS

COVER LETTER TO EDUCATORS

FIRST MAILING OF SURVEY

Dear

I am a doctoral dissertation student at the University of the Pacific in Stockton. The topic of my dissertation is An Analysis of the Relationship Between School Districts and the Press in California.

To gather information for the study, I am sending surveys to all superintendents and public information/community relations officers in school districts with over 10,000 ADA. Please complete the enclosed survey and return it to me by January 5, 1984, in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. All replies will be confidential, and the study will not discuss individual school districts.

Thank you for responding to the survey. With your help, I will be able to write a valid study which could be of value to school districts as they work with the press.

Sincerely yours,

LINDA WARK
High School Projects Director
Sacramento City Unified School District

COVER LETTER TO JOURNALISTS

FIRST MAILING OF SURVEY

Dear

I am a doctoral dissertation student at the University of the Pacific in Stockton. The topic of my study is An Analysis of the Relationship Between School Districts and the Press in California.

To gather information for the study, I am sending surveys to all editors and education writers, if applicable, of newspapers in cities which have large school districts. Please complete the enclosed survey and return it to me by January 5, 1984, in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. All replies will be confidential, and the study will not discuss individual cities or newspapers.

Thank you for responding to the survey. With your help, I will be able to write a valid study which could be of value to the press as it reports school news.

Sincerely yours,

LINDA WARK
High School Projects Director
Sacramento City Unified School District

COVER LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS

FOLLOW-UP MAILING OF SURVEY

120

Dear

In December, I sent you a survey on press/school district relationships in California. The survey is being used to gather data for my doctoral dissertation.

Even though you may delegate your district's public information program to another staff member, your leadership role sets the tone and gives direction to your district's relationship with the press and, as such, your opinions are critical to the validity of the study.

Please complete the enclosed survey and return it by February 3, 1984, in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. If you have returned your survey, please disregard this letter.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

LINDA WARK
High School Projects Director
Sacramento City Unified School District

COVER LETTER TO PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS
FOLLOW-UP MAILING OF SURVEY

Dear

In December, I sent you a survey on press/school district relationships in California. The survey is being used to gather data for my doctoral dissertation.

As the person who has direct responsibility for implementing your district's public information program and who works closely with the press, your opinions are critical to the validity of the study.

Please complete the enclosed survey and return it by February 3, 1984, in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. If you have returned your survey, please disregard this letter.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

LINDA WARK
High School Projects Director
Sacramento City Unified School District

.

COVER LETTER TO EDITORS
FOLLOW-UP MAILING OF SURVEY

122

Dear

In December, I sent you a survey on press/school district relationships in California. The survey is being used to gather data for my doctoral dissertation.

Even though you may have little direct contact with school district personnel, your leadership role sets the tone and gives direction to your paper's relationship with school districts and, as such, your opinions are critical to the validity of the study. Please complete the enclosed survey and return it by February 3, 1984, in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. If you have returned your survey, please disregard this letter.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

LINDA WARK
High School Projects Director
Sacramento City Unified School District

COVER LETTER TO EDUCATION REPORTERS

FOLLOW-UP MAILING OF SURVEY

Dear

In December, I sent you a survey on press/school district relationships in California. The survey is being used to gather data for my doctoral dissertation.

As the person who has direct responsibility for covering school district news, your opinions are critical to the validity of the study. Please complete the enclosed survey and return it by February 3, 1984, in the stamped, self-addressed envelope. If you have returned your survey, please disregard this letter.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

LINDA WARK
High School Projects Director
Sacramento City Unified School District

APPENDIX C

SUPPORT LETTERS FOR SURVEY

SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

N STREET, P.O. BOX 2271
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95810
PHONE: (916) 454-8671

GIUGNI
Superintendent



12

SUPPORT LETTER FROM A SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Colleague:

Attached is a survey form for a doctoral dissertation conducted by Mrs. Linda Wark, director, High School Projects. It is entitled "An Analysis of the Relationships Between the School District and the Press."

I hope that you will be able to participate in the survey, since the information to be gained from the study will be invaluable to school districts. It is an area that is of great importance to all of us, particularly at this time when school districts are in the limelight and receive so much attention from the press.

Mrs. Wark is a long-time employee of the Sacramento City Unified School District, and has served as a teacher, coordinator, and director of High School Projects during that time. I am confident that her findings will assist school districts to improve district/press relationships in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tom Giugni", is written over the typed name.

Tom Giugni
Superintendent

TG:rk

Attachment

The Sacramento Union

126

301 CAPITOL MALL
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95812

TELEPHONE
916-442-7811

SUPPORT LETTER FROM AN EDUCATION REPORTER

January 19, 1984

For her study on the relationships between school districts and the press, Linda Wark is making a final survey of reporters.

I hope that you'll be able to assist her. Linda has been a news source for me for several years, and I've always found her to be forthright and trustworthy. Additionally, I think the topic of her study is important and interesting.

Very truly yours,

Michael Fallon
Education Writer



APPENDIX D

SURVEY RELIABILITY TABLES

Table 23
Item Reliability Using Pearson R

Educator Item No.	Coefficient	Journalist Item No.	Coefficient
1	.75	1	.31
2	.62	2	.66
3	.69	3	.47
4	.76	4	.77
5	.46	5	.46
6	.36	6	.40
7	.51	7	.19
8	.65	8	.74
9	.59	9	.79
10	.59	10	Could not be computed
11	.36	11	.89
12	.52	12	.43
13	.64		
14	.11		

Item 10 on the journalists' survey could not be computed, since all respondents checked choice "5" on the post-test.

Table 24
Item Reliability Using
Percent Agreement Between Pre- and Post-Test

Educator Item No.	Percent	Journalist Item No.	Percent
16 a	75.0	14 a	100.0
b	79.2	b	93.3
c	75.0	c	73.3
d	87.5	d	93.4
e	83.4	e	86.7
f	70.9	f	86.6
17 a	75.0	g	86.7
b	87.5	h	80.0
c	79.2	15 a	80.0
d	75.0	b	100.0
e	83.3	c	66.7
f	92.6	d	73.4
g	83.4	e	80.0
h	91.7	f	80.0
i	75.0	g	73.3
j	100.0	h	80.0
18 a	95.8	16 a	80.0
b	62.5	b	73.3
c	75.0	c	73.3
d	100.0	d	86.7
e	83.3	e	66.6

Table 24 (continued)

Educator Item No.	Percent	Journalist Item No.	Percent
18 f	79.2	16 f	80.0
g	87.5	17 a	93.4
h	95.8	b	86.7
i	91.7	c	93.3
j	70.9	d	73.3
k	100.0	e	80.0
l	87.5	f	93.4
m	70.8	g	86.7
n	92.6	h	92.8
o	91.1	i	93.3
p	83.3	j	92.8
q	87.5		
r	95.9		
s	87.5		
t	70.8		
u	79.2		

APPENDIX E

EXPANDED TABLES FROM STUDY

Table 25

Educators' Responses to Survey Items on
District Public Information Policies and Procedures

Item	<u>"Yes" Responses</u>			
	<u>Superintendent</u>		<u>PIO</u>	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Does your district have a specific public information/press policy?	43	58.1%	34	59.6%
If yes, are the newspaper personnel aware of your policy?	40	87.0%	27	75.0%
Does your district have a PIO or its equivalent?	46	59.7%	47	82.5%
If yes, does the PIO have a staff?	33	66.0%	30	62.5%
Does the PIO have a budget, exclusive of salaries?	44	83.0%	40	83.3%
Does the PIO report directly to the superintendent?	39	78.0%	44	89.8%
Is the PIO part of the superintendent's executive staff or council?	32	62.7%	35	71.4%
Does your district have specific procedures for working with the press?	45	65.2%	39	69.6%

Table 26

Educators' Responses to Survey Items
Asking for Additional Information on Policy/Procedures

Item	Percent of Responses			
	Superintendent		PIO	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
PIO Assignment				
Full Time	28	36.4%	28	48.3%
Part Time	18	23.4%	18	31.0%
PIO's Staff				
1 - 3 People	27	81.3%	25	83.3%
4 - 7 People	2	6.1%	2	6.1%
8+ People	4	12.1%	3	10.0%
PIO's Budget				
Under \$5,000	13	16.9%	8	13.8%
\$ 5,000 - \$ 9,999	7	9.1%	11	19.0%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	7	9.1%	8	13.8%
\$15,000+	16	20.8%	13	22.4%
Press' First District Contact				
Superintendent	38	49.4%	20	34.5%
PIO	37	48.1%	41	70.7%
Any Administrator	18	23.4%	13	22.4%
Recommended PIO Education and Training				
Journalism	47	61.0%	37	63.8%
Public Relations	52	67.5%	47	81.0%
Teaching or Administrative	25	32.5%	26	44.8%

Table 27

Journalists' Responses to Survey Items on
Districts' Public Information Policies and Procedures

Item	<u>"Yes" Responses</u>			
	<u>Editor</u>		<u>Reporter</u>	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Do the large school districts in your area have specific public information/press policies?	20	71.4%	19	65.5%
<u>Percent of Responses</u>				
Press' First District Contact				
Superintendent	11	30.6%	7	21.9%
PIO	8	22.2%	6	18.8%
Any Administrator	8	22.2%	7	21.9%
Varies from district to district	17	47.2%	18	56.3%
Recommended PIO Education and Training				
Journalism	23	63.9%	24	75.0%
Public Relations	13	36.1%	10	31.3%
Teaching or Administrative	14	38.9%	9	28.1%

Table 28

Educators' and Journalists'
Responses to Selected Survey Items

Item	<u>Educators</u>		<u>Journalists</u>		<u>p</u>
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Districts have specific public information/press policy	77	58.8%	39	68.4%	< .7348
Press' First District Contact					
Superintendent	58	43.3%	15	22.1%	< .003
PIO	78	57.8%	9	13.2%	< .0001
Any Administrator	31	23.0%	15	22.1%	< .8845
Recommended PIO Education & Training					
Journalism	84	62.2%	50	73.5%	< .1084
Public Relations	99	73.3%	28	41.2%	< .0001
Teaching/Administrative	51	38.1%	31	45.6%	< .3032

Table 29
Educators' and Journalists' Responses to
Survey Items on District Public Information/Press Practices

Practice	<u>Educators' Responses</u>		<u>Journalists' Responses</u>		<u>p</u>
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Are accessible to reporters	127	94.1%	57	83.8%	< .018
Correct errors in facts which occur in stories	80	59.3%	46	67.6%	< .2450
Give reporters staff home telephone numbers	53	39.3%	31	45.6%	< .3875
Respond promptly to reporters' inquiries	125	92.6%	42	61.8%	< .0001
Send out accurate and useful press releases	105	77.8%	15	22.1%	< .0001
Know reporters by first names	119	88.1%	50	73.5%	< .0085
Talk off the record to reporters	51	37.8%	35	51.5%	< .0624
Suggest how a story should be written	16	11.9%	9	13.2%	< .7771
Compliment reporters for stories	111	82.2%	29	42.6%	< .0001

Table 29 (continued)

Practice	<u>Educators' Responses</u>		<u>Journalists' Responses</u>		<u>p</u>
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Give notes to reporters unable to attend meetings	98	72.6%	11	16.2%	< .0001
Reserve space for reporters at board of education meetings	125	92.6%	52	76.5%	< .0012
Solicit reporters' advice about the districts' public information program	36	26.7%	9	13.2%	< .0297
Use educational language in press releases or interviews	12	8.9%	27	39.7%	< .0001
Ask to see a story before it is published	3	1.5%	2	4.4%	< .2036
Alert reporters to important stories about to develop	114	84.4%	30	44.1%	< .0001
Prepare background statements in advance on potentially controversial news stories	89	65.9%	9	13.2%	< .0001
Alert reporters to possible feature stories	127	94.1%	46	67.6%	< .0001
Give reporters complete agendas before board of education meetings	131	97.0%	53	77.9%	< .0001

Table 29 (continued)

Practice	<u>Educators' Responses</u>		<u>Journalists' Responses</u>		<u>p</u>
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Give reporters any information they want about the district	108	80.0%	34	50.0%	< .0001
Invite and orient reporters to district and school functions	101	74.8%	28	41.2%	< .0001
React publicly to headlines and editorials	14	10.4%	20	29.4%	< .0006

Table 30

Educators' Responses to Survey Items on Press Treatment of Their Districts

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p
How would you characterize newspaper stories about your district?	Superintendent		Positive			Negative	
			1	2	3	4	5
	PIO	N	21	42	12	1	1
		%	27.3	54.5	15.6	1.3	1.3
		N	11	37	9	1	0
		%	19.0	63.8	15.5	1.7	0
How much space or time does the press give your district?	Superintendent		Great			Little	
			1	2	3	4	5
	PIO	N	14	32	26	2	2
		%	18.4	42.1	34.2	2.6	2.6
		N	11	24	16	6	0
		%	19.3	42.1	28.1	10.5	0
How does the press portray your district in stories?	Superintendent		Accurately			Inaccurately	
			1	2	3	4	5
	PIO	N	14	46	13	2	1
		%	18.4	60.5	17.1	2.6	1.3
		N	11	35	10	1	0
		%	19.3	61.4	17.5	1.8	0

< .6917

< .26

< .9271

Table 30 (continued)

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p
To what depth do reporters report stories about your district?	Superintendent		Comprehensively			Superficially	
			1	2	3	4	5
		N	9	32	28	6	1
		%	11.8	42.1	36.8	7.9	1.3
	PIO	N	6	23	23	4	0
		%	10.7	41.1	41.1	7.1	0
What type of stories about your district are most often in the news?	Superintendent		Sensational			Human Interest	
			1	2	3	4	5
		N	2	6	35	29	3
		%	2.7	8.0	46.7	38.7	4.0
	PIO	N	3	7	22	23	1
		%	5.4	12.5	39.3	41.1	1.8
How would you characterize news stories about your district?	Superintendent		Biased			Unbiased	
			1	2	3	4	5
		N	2	5	17	43	10
		%	2.6	6.5	22.1	55.8	13.0
	PIO	N	3	5	18	20	11
		%	5.3	8.8	31.6	35.1	19.3

Table 31

Educators' and Journalists' Responses to Survey Items on the Press' Role in Education

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p
			Agree 1	2	3	Disagree 4 5	
The press should criticize education.	Superintendent	N	14	24	29	7 3	< .9898
		%	18.2	31.2	37.7	9.1 3.9	
	PIO	N	12	17	20	6 2	< .3349
		%	21.1	29.8	35.1	10.5 3.5	
	Editor	N	22	5	2	1 4	< .3349
		%	64.7	14.7	5.9	2.9 11.8	
	Reporter	N	18	7	3	1 0	< .3349
		%	62.1	24.1	10.3	3.4 0	
The press should only report on facts about actions of the district.	Superintendent	N	14	12	18	15 15	< .3934
		%	18.9	16.2	24.3	20.3 20.3	
	PIO	N	12	12	6	14 11	< .5120
		%	21.8	21.8	10.9	25.5 20.0	
	Editor	N	5	3	0	3 21	< .5120
		%	15.6	9.4	0	9.4 65.6	
	Reporter	N	4	1	1	6 18	< .5120
		%	13.3	3.3	3.3	20.0 60.0	

Table 31 (continued)

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p		
			Agree 1	2	3	Disagree 4	5		
The press should judge actions of the district in editorials.	Superintendent	N	20	24	16	9	8	< .3054	
		%	26.0	31.2	20.8	11.7	10.4		
	PIO	N	18	22	11	5	1	< .3762	
		%	31.6	38.6	19.3	8.8	1.8		
	Editor	N	32	1	1	2	0	< .3762	
		%	88.9	2.8	2.8	5.6	0		
	Reporter	N	25	4	2	1	0	< .3762	
		%	18.1	12.5	6.3	3.1	0		
	The press should evaluate results of district programs	Superintendent	N	11	18	24	9	14	< .9242
			%	14.5	23.7	31.6	11.8	18.4	
		PIO	N	10	15	14	6	11	< .9242
			%	17.9	26.8	25.0	10.7	19.6	
Editor		N	29	2	5	0	0	< .0697	
		%	80.6	5.6	13.9	0	0		
Reporter		N	22	7	1	1	0	< .0697	
		%	71.0	22.6	3.2	3.2	0		

Table 31 (continued)

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p
		Agree 1	2	3	Disagree 4	5	
The press should provide a catalyst for school improvement.	Superintendent	N 11	20	21	13	10	< .9554
		% 14.7	26.7	28.0	17.3	13.3	
	PIO	N 6	16	17	9	6	
		% 11.1	29.6	31.5	16.7	11.1	
	Editor	N 23	1	10	1	0	
		% 65.7	2.9	28.6	2.9	0	
	Reporter	N 12	7	11	0	0	< .034
		% 40.0	23.3	36.7	0	0	
	Superintendent	N 1	2	4	16	53	
		% 1.3	2.6	5.3	21.1	69.7	
	PIO	N 0	0	9	7	38	
		% 0	0	16.7	13.0	78.4	
The press should have no role in public education.	Editor	N 0	0	1	1	31	< .1159
		% 0	0	3.0	3.0	93.9	
	Reporter	N 0	0	3	4	25	
		% 0	0	9.4	12.5	78.1	
	Superintendent	N 1	2	4	16	53	
		% 1.3	2.6	5.3	21.1	69.7	
	PIO	N 0	0	9	7	38	
		% 0	0	16.7	13.0	78.4	

Table 32

Journalists' Responses to Survey Items on District Public Information Efforts

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p
How would you characterize the public information efforts of the large districts in your area?	Editor		Successful			Unsuccessful	
			1	2	3	4	5
	Reporter	N	5	13	11	6	1
		%	13.9	36.1	30.6	16.7	2.8
		N	1	13	11	7	0
		%	3.1	40.6	34.4	21.9	0
How much time, effort and money do the districts in your area appear to give to their public information programs?	Editor		Great			Little	
			1	2	3	4	5
	Reporter	N	0	10	16	9	1
		%	0	27.8	44.4	25.0	2.8
		N	3	8	9	11	1
		%	9.4	25.0	28.1	34.4	3.1

< .4748

< .2708

Table 32 (continued)

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p
			Agree 1	2	3	Disagree 4 5	
An effective public information program can aid a district in getting good press.	Editor	N	14	13	4	3 2	< .5106
		%	38.9	36.1	11.1	8.3 5.6	
	Reporter	N	14	14	3	0 1	
		%	43.8	43.8	9.4	0 3.1	
Most school district administrators do not know how to work effectively with reporters.	Editor	N	11	4	15	2 3	< .0385
		%	31.4	11.4	42.9	5.7 8.6	
	Reporter	N	4	11	9	6 2	
		%	12.5	34.4	28.1	18.8 6.3	

Table 33

Journalists' Responses to Survey Items on the
Reasons Public Information Programs Are Unsuccessful

Item	<u>Response</u>				p
	<u>Editor</u>		<u>Reporter</u>		
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Too many meaningless press releases	8	22.2%	10	31.3%	< .3996
Copy which does not adhere to our format	1	2.8%	2	6.3%	< .4865
Lack of clearly defined public information policies/procedures	8	22.2%	6	18.8%	< .7238
Lack of access to administrators	5	13.9%	5	15.6%	< .8401
Hostile or emotional administrators	6	16.7%	1	3.1%	< .0666
Lack of access to information	13	36.1%	8	25.0%	< .3222
Lack of current information	8	22.2%	8	25.0%	< .7875
Failure to give adequate background information	7	19.4%	7	21.9%	< .8046

Table 34

Journalists' Responses to Survey Item on the
Reasons Public Information Programs Are Successful

Item	<u>Response</u>				
	<u>Editor</u>		<u>Reporter</u>		<u>p</u>
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Good press releases	8	22.2%	11	34.4%	< .2650
Copy which adheres to our format	3	8.3%	3	9.4%	< .8798
Clearly defined public information policies/procedures	8	22.2%	3	9.4%	< .151
Access to administrators	26	72.2%	21	65.6%	< .5567
Congenial, helpful administrators	18	50.0%	15	46.9%	< .7969
Access to information	22	61.1%	18	56.3%	< .6843
Current information available	20	55.6%	14	43.8%	< .3311
Adequate background information	9	25.0%	15	46.9%	< .0596

Table 35

Educators' and Journalists' Responses to Likert-type Survey Items on Working Relationships

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p	
		Harmonious 1	2	3	Adversarial 4	5		
How would you characterize your working relationship?	Superintendent	N	44	24	6	1	2	< .4771
		%	57.1	31.2	7.8	1.3	2.6	
	PIO	N	30	20	4	3	0	
		%	52.6	35.1	7.0	5.3	0	
	Editor	N	7	15	9	5	0	< .6700
		%	19.4	41.7	2.5	13.9	0	
	Reporter	N	7	16	6	2	0	
		%	22.6	51.6	19.4	6.5	0	

Table 35 (continued)

Survey Item	Respondent Category	Response					p
			Seldom 1	2	3	Frequently 4 5	
Can the school district and the press work together harmoniously?	Superintendent	N	1	2	6	31 37	< .8017
		%	1.3	2.6	7.8	40.3 48.1	
	PIO	N	2	3	3	23 27	
		%	3.4	5.2	5.2	39.7 46.6	
	Editor	N	0	2	6	19 9	< .5088
		%	0	5.6	16.7	52.8 25.0	
	Reporter	N	1	3	9	13 6	
		%	3.1	9.4	28.1	40.6 18.8	

Table 36

Educators' and Journalists' Responses to Survey Item on Factors Hurting Their Working Relationship

Factor	Respondent					Respondent				
	<u>Superintendent</u>		<u>PIO</u>		<u>p</u>	<u>Editor</u>		<u>Reporter</u>		<u>p</u>
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent		No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Uncooperative administrators	36	46.8%	24	41.4%	< .5339	29	80.6%	18	56.3%	< .0304
Aggressive reporters	37	48.1%	28	48.3%	< .9794	14	38.9%	4	12.5%	< .0138
Educators' lack of knowledge about newspaper procedures	37	48.1%	32	55.2%	< .4126	22	61.1%	14	43.8%	< .1522
Differing aims and goals of the two institutions	53	68.8%	39	67.2%	< .8444	22	61.1%	19	59.4%	< .8839
Press' interest in the sensational and the immediate	40	51.5%	26	44.8%	< .4126	9	25.0%	7	21.9%	< .7617
Lack of candor	28	36.4%	12	20.7%	< .0483	24	66.7%	18	56.3%	< .3776

Table 37

A Comparison of Educators' and Journalists' Responses to
Survey Item on Factors Hurting Their Working Relationship

Item	<u>Respondent</u>				<u>p</u>
	<u>Educators</u>		<u>Journalists</u>		
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Uncooperative administrators	60	44.4%	47	69.1%	< .0009
Aggressive reporters	65	48.1%	18	26.5%	< .003
Educators' lack of knowledge about newspaper procedures	69	51.1%	36	52.9%	< .8055
Differing aims and goals of the two institutions	92	68.1%	41	60.3%	< .2665
Press' interest in the sensational and the immediate	66	48.9%	18	23.5%	< .0005
Lack of candor	40	29.6%	42	61.8%	< .0001

Table 38

Educators' and Journalists' Responses to Survey Items Characterizing Their Working Relationship

Characteristic	Respondent					Respondent				
	<u>Superintendent</u>		<u>PIO</u>		<u>p</u>	<u>Editor</u>		<u>Reporter</u>		<u>p</u>
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent		No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Harmonious	62	80.5%	51	87.9%	< .2484	19	52.8%	19	59.4%	< .5845
Ambiguous	1	1.3%	2	3.4%	< .4016	6	16.7%	5	15.6%	< .9073
Supportive	48	62.3%	30	51.7%	< .2165	6	16.7%	2	6.3%	< .1833
Trusting	38	49.4%	25	43.1%	< .4714	5	13.9%	12	37.5%	< .0248
Cooperative	65	84.4%	52	89.7%	< .3753	24	66.7%	22	68.8%	< .8546
Adversarial	3	3.9%	2	3.4%	< .8915	3	8.3%	5	15.6%	< .3516
Clear	26	33.8%	18	31.0%	< .7375	9	25.0%	6	18.8%	< .5350
Divisive	1	1.3%	0	0	< .3837	0	0	1	3.1%	< .2853
Wary	10	13.0%	12	20.7%	< .2303	17	47.2%	6	18.8%	< .0132
Uncooperative	3	3.9%	0	0	< .1285	0	0	2	6.3%	< .1279

Table 39

A Comparison of Educators' and Journalists' Responses
to Survey Item Characterizing Their Working Relationship

Characteristic	Respondent				p
	Educator		Journalist		
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Harmonious	113	83.7%	38	55.9%	< .0001
Ambiguous	3	2.2%	11	16.2%	< .0002
Supportive	78	57.8%	8	11.8%	< .0001
Trusting	63	46.7%	17	25.0%	< .0029
Cooperative	117	86.7%	46	67.6%	< .0013
Adversarial	5	3.7%	8	11.8%	< .0268
Clear	44	32.6%	15	22.1%	< .1187
Divisive	1	.7%	1	1.5%	< .6192
Wary	22	16.3%	23	33.8%	< .0045
Uncooperative	3	2.2%	2	2.9%	< .7551

APPENDIX F

RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS

Respondents' Comments

Educators and journalists were given the opportunity to write in a response on a number of survey items. A greater percentage of journalists than educators availed themselves of this opportunity, more editors than reporters, and more public information officers than superintendents. In fact, fewer superintendents than any other group wrote in comments.

The comments are grouped by objective, but are in no way ranked or categorized within an objective. The comments are all direct quotations, and idiosyncracies of style, sentence structure, or punctuation are the respondents' own.

Public Information Officers' Comments:

Press Coverage, Working Relationships and the Press' Role in Education

Depending on story--If the press writes from a district press release, the article tends to be more accurate. The problem is when they bias a controversial story without all of the facts.

I have to assume that the press has access to information but all parties must present to the press complete and true information. Problem area-- the attempt by biased superintendents to give misleading information to the press.

The press should criticize education if its remarks are valid and of substance.

The ideal role of the press in education should be to keep people informed about actions and facts about schools'/districts' programs and policies. They should save judgement and criticism for the editorial page. However, they should report on those groups, individuals and agencies which are critical of education as long as they both sides of the story.

Responsible newspapers can be a powerful force for improving public education. The fine line between responsible and irresponsible criticism must be noted. We find that the better informed a writer is, the more responsible the criticism is. Schools should expect scrutiny and criticism of shortcomings, but they should also receive greater recognition of their strengths and unusual, newsworthy accomplishments.

The press needs to be factual--report, not make, news

The press should be investigative and provide depth of articles. The press should really care about public education. It should educate the public about its schools.

The media, especially print, carry great weight with the public. Thus newspapers must shoulder the responsibility for accurate, unbiased reporting . . .

While it is true that public confidence is perhaps the greatest challenge facing education, it is not the direct responsibility of the press. Rather, PIO's and administrators must provide the positive information that will increase public awareness and confidence. The press is the most effective mouthpiece for educators to spread the word, but the press has a responsibility to report with accuracy and without bias. A fair and accurate press will report on improvements in education, if in fact, there is proof of improvement in education.

. . . it's a function of the PIO's job to secure a good working relationship with the press--"taking care" of reporters; seeing they have the information they need. . . suggesting stories. . .

Press does not have the true expertise to evaluate program results. They have a right to give opinions, but they should be realistic about their capabilities and limitations

Superintendents' Comments:

Press Coverage, Working Relationships, and the Press' Role in Education

Constructive rather than destructive evaluation

Local papers do not have enough staff to research stories in depth

Coverage varies, reporters have to be spoon fed

The press is not qualified to judge district actions. We should evaluate, the press should report

The press makes money on us. This is unethical and unjust.

The press must report about school district activities--they are not qualified to judge or evaluate

There are sensational stories which tend to get more attention from the reader than the ongoing human interest stories.

With the reporters serving the educational beat, we have good rapport. We do experience problems with the management of the newspaper.

The major education writer in our area has stated, "Any district that employs a special person to assist me is going to get a good deal of my personal attention." We enjoy a satisfactory and trusted relationship with the media largely because the district--which is not rich--invests funds in this position, reflecting an open information policy and an awareness of the needs of the press. Our major problem is competition for space with 33 other school districts in the circulation area(s) of the major newspapers.

The press should criticize education only if justified.

Public education in our society depends upon an informed (accurately) public. The press . . . are one of the major communication lines. Therefore, the press has the responsibility for educating itself in the area of competent education. Irresponsible headlining of test scores only, without equal coverage of the other part of what makes an educated student is very misleading to the public.

Public Information Officers' Comments:

Factors That Hurt the Working Relationship

Giving misinformation to the press knowingly

These hurtful relationships are indicative of a district which has no overall plan for communicating with its public.

High turnover rate of educational reporters

Lack of press understanding of issues--misquoting or quoting out of context

All can apply. A PIO needs support from superintendent for doing the job.

Frequent change in reporters

Inaccurate reporting--errors of basic fact.

Reporters lack of understanding

Laziness on part of PIO or reporter

Reporters who know nothing about education. Rapid turnover (Every time I train one, a new one takes his/her place).

Their continual use of the (sordid) past to discuss the present

Lack of space in paper for local reporting, therefore lack of interest in probing articles.

Uninformed reporters

Superintendents' Comments:

Factors That Hurt the Working Relationship

Changes in reporters and changes in newspaper policy

Newspapers are profit making businesses designed to sell newspapers

Little preparation by administrator, hiding important information, holding grudges, reacting to editorials

Lack of space for articles

Inexperienced reporters

Lack of mutual respect

Lack of proper background information of the school district and specific issues by reporters; also, different reporters covering the same district, with no one having in-depth knowledge.

Board members biases toward press

Fear!

Lack of knowledge about education

Public Information Officers' Responses to
How the Press Could Improve its Working Relationship with School Districts

Assign a reporter with a genuine interest in public education the "school beat" and not expect much else from that reporter. Covering a large unified school district for a local newspaper is a full-time job.

Forget the Watergate era and balance school news between the investigative and the interpretive methods of reporting. Above all, get to know the schools; their assets as well as their needs, and if the schools are to be judged, judge them on the basis of their resources and student backgrounds such as high AFDC, minority, special and compensatory needs.

In articles, explore the issues completely, and avoid sensationalism in headlines. Take time to talk over a potentially controversial subject with the PIO, superintendent and other administrators or teachers involved--try to gain input from a variety of sources so that the "whole" story can be told.

Professionalism on both sides is the main factor which contributes to a beneficial relationship.

Not necessary in our district. A great relationship exists.

Feature instructional accomplishments instead of budgets and employee confrontations, i.e., collective bargaining

Tell the story accurately--don't try to create animosity between parties just to increase news value

Check all facts--Double check on controversial issues--Cover more positive human interest stories

Check the facts--a news story is not necessarily an accurate news story.

Think children first. Be fair show both sides--

Maintain the same reporter on the education beat for longer time.

Experience the schools through other than Board meetings

No games; be factual; no bias

Try to build the importance of education in the eyes of the readers.

I think we may be the ones that need to improve our relationship with the press.

Make an effort to identify problems school districts deal with that could change with community insight (thru media) rather than only pouncing on scores.

Avoid calling administrators at home late at night

Obtain sufficient information about programs they choose to write about

Encourage all press to attend all board meetings--give more lead time when they need information re specific areas.

All medias should be reminded of its massive powers to forge public opinion. Accuracy is the key factor for maintaining positive relations--accuracy on both sides.

Tell both sides (teacher and administrator) publish positive events occurring in schools

Seek a better understanding of the issues or gain more knowledge about educational goals, objectives and procedures

Would like more indepth coverage of educational programs--Coverage of district is largely from Board of Education meetings.

Make sure they've done their homework.

Check out facts before running a story. We don't expect the press to be public relations for the district. We do expect information in newspapers to be accurate in letter and spirit. Hire reporters who are intelligent and fair.

Don't be rude to site managers. Instruct photographers to use common courtesy when getting shots.

Our situation has gone from the strongly adversarial to almost cordial during the last decade. . . We are all in this together and everyone can help.

More indepth stories about the "good" news--curriculum improvements, etc.

Report accurately; when in doubt - call the PIO; show an interest in the district by visiting schools for an occasional feature story and attend critical Board of Education meetings and study sessions.

See for yourself what is happening in our schools. . . .Don't jump to conclusions until you have checked out the facts. Recognize excellence as well as failure. Be no more critical of public schools than you are of the fourth estate.

Stay more involved over a longer period of time. Get to know the people. We've nothing to hide. We can work for the betterment of society.

I am in the fortunate position of working with reporters who are highly professional.

Spend more time with us; do more backgrounding; don't be so dependent on the PIO.

The press should be as quick to report positive results of programs as it is to report negative ones.

To stop viewing district actions as all negative.

We do not have any problems with the press at this time.

Clear (verify) information with PIO before printing story if facts are not completely understood and/or complete.

Report the good as well as the bad--and our local paper does.

Present balance in stories. Help educate the public about its schools and programs.

Spend more time in classrooms--less at meetings.

Learn about your school district and public education. Establish communication with PIO and superintendent. . . . Be fair. We all have a job to do. When we can work together, we both benefit.

Try to understand the district and its problems. Don't judge superficially. Do a better job with features. Concentrate more on the district and less on the board meetings.

Superintendents' Responses to How the Press Could
Improve Its Working Relationship with School Districts

Learn as much as possible about the school district--its strengths and its weaknesses.

Both press and school district should recognize each other's primary function--"openness" works wonders

Do stories in depth.

Learn as much as possible about new legislation which affects schools

Do your homework

Be open, honest and tell them everything. --Don't hold back.

No suggestions necessary

Press relations depend a great deal on the reporter.

Space and more time positive news

Maintain current procedures and attitudes. Except the person writing the headlines is different from the person writing the story. Sometimes the headline is negative when the story is not--

Visit schools more; see our educational programs.

Contact us earlier, do your homework, follow-up on stories

Be more evenhanded in presentation--less sensational, more understanding of time, pressures, etc. Check out leads before printing--you have the right to print but we have the right to have it accurate.

Do your homework before writing a story.

Show greater interest in the daily activities that are successful.

Gain broader understanding of problems associated with education; recognize that some questions are not easily answered. Leave the interpretation of education to those qualified to do it.

They would not listen and they would go about their business as usual.

Help us to get the positive out, as well as the sensational.

Continue to work to be objective in "news stories." Same opinion for the editorial page. Research completely stories prior to publishing them.

Please be accurate - and get the facts!

More space and time devoted to education on the local level, less national sensationalism

We have an outstanding relationship with the reporters. We do have an occasional disagreement with some editorials; however, I do not try to correct points of view - distorted facts - yes.

Respond factually in stories, build a high level of trust.

Emphasize the positive more often. Keep reporters on educational financial matters so they can understand

Don't sensationalize stories that end up hurting the school district (students or employees).

Have a firm policy for regularly publishing stories about the positive things that happen regularly in schools.

Accent the positive!

Report on first hand basis--not rumors or information received secondhand.

Be as objective and balanced as possible. The welfare of the whole community is served by having a school district with a good reputation.

Ask many questions and continuously check facts.

Stop a revolving door practice of assigning reporters.

Always report accurately when quoting school officials.

Spend time in the schools or support sites as well as the Board room.

Inform yourself as well as you can about educational issues and what is going on in the district.

Keep the same reporter around for more than 6 months.

Make and maintain regular contact with the superintendent and PIO.

Keep up the good work

Talk with us; visit schools, show pictures of children learning

Devote more space to public education and less to crime, violence and what happens in remote parts of the U.S.A.

We have an outstanding relationship, mutual respect and close cooperation.

Be honest and open--develop trust with the district.

A great relationship exists.

Attempt to be more constructive and factual in their reporting

Take time--and space--to demonstrate interest in the "positive" instructional programs a district is offering. Reporters new to the education beat should work with district personnel to learn the complexities of school finance and district budget implications. Administrators then might be more open and responsive when hard news breaks.

Concentrate on the positive accomplishments of the District--realize its importance in the total community and as it succeeds so does the community.

Clean up the headlines on stories to tell the story more accurately. Better judgment on using "editorials" on education from other cities (N.Y., St. Louis, Chicago) that paint all schools and school districts with the same brush!

Reporters' Comments:

The Press' Role in Education, District Efforts, and Working Relationships

Adversarial to the extent that the paper does not serve solely as mouthpiece for schools. Critical if criticism is merited, not for the sake of criticism itself.

Public relations efforts often disorganized, more district-wide coordination needed. Newspapers' role still perceived by some as an advocate of all public education.

School officials must learn to be candid and speak in simple American.

A good working relationship is important in the fair portrayal of education.

The outlook that a school district has for the media depends to a large extent on whether the superintendent sees the press as friend or foe.

I'm going to report on anything I damn well like. If the district doesn't like it, that's too bad.

It helps to have an accessible PIO and staff from whom to get answers to routine or statistical questions quickly. However, in times of controversy, it would be better if there were a less cumbersome bureaucracy impeding access to the officials who are really in control and in the know.

Education reporting is a dual responsibility. Feature school activities, because presumably readers have kids in schools. Criticize and judge serve needs of general readership and pupils.

District eager to talk about nice features, but not cooperative if they see a story as "negative."

Editors' Comments:The Press' Role in Education, District Efforts,
and Working Relationships

The press plays a large role in informing the public. It criticizes and evaluates and a catalyst by informing and reporting on members of the public who actively and directly take on the roles of critic, evaluator, and catalyst. Too much of a public information program, particularly one that is "boosterism", can backfire.

Harmony is keyword. Also accuracy and objectivity in writing about education.

The press should criticize education in a manner consistent with improving education. Criticism must be even-handed in both its positive and negative forms. It should not be criticism for criticism's sake.

The best PR person is the child who reports back to his parents--and reflects a good education.

District administrators do not contact us often enough with "good news" or feature stories. With many districts, we must count on them to contact us.

The press should go far beyond district administrators and PIO's in reporting school news. The public wants to understand schools--warts and all--to care about them.

Educators need to relax more with the media, we're not all sharks out to eat them. Let us know the good things, and respond to the bad.

The press reports facts and the opinions of others--bad or good.

The press should analyze educational issues and cover both the strengths and weaknesses of school districts. Objective coverage promises discussion, which can lead to positive change.

Reporters' Comments:

Successful and Unsuccessful Public Information Programs

Lack of good story ideas--pass along "fluff"

They have no organized program for public relations--have no PIO

Little knowledge of total operation

Attitude that the public doesn't need to know certain things

A few large districts pay absolutely no attention to it.

Lack of money for a paid PIO

Well trained reporters who know how to ask the right questions

A PIO with journalism background and understanding

Willingness to work with the press

Editors' Comments:

Successful and Unsuccessful Public Information Programs

Attempts to put cosmetics on problem areas.

Poor PR person who does as little as possible

Not a great deal of effort, generally, on the districts to publicize themselves.

Fear of bad publicity; refusal to admit shortcomings

Money to have a PIO and staff

Open working relationship

Mutual trust between district personnel and newspaper

Just simply offering story ideas--at least for consideration--would be a good idea on their part.

Willingness to expose deficiencies

Prompt cooperation

PIO concentrates on different stuff--canned food drive, etc.

Lack of press releases on a timely basis to keep newspapers informed.

Lack of timely phone call/too much dependence on written releases

Failure of certain employees to return phone calls

Closed meetings

Unsophisticated administrators

Failure to notify press on stories because the PIO lacks news judgment

Fear of less than laudatory coverage

Reporters' Comments:

Factors Which Hurt the Working Relationship

School administrators' hesitancy to speak to issues because of
(fear, lack of knowledge?)

Root of most problems--inaccessible administrators

Districts' desire to keep public schools private

Educator's lack of understanding of media's purpose.

Editors' Comments:

Factors Which Hurt the Working Relationship

Teacher's union using newspaper as propaganda tool

Poor PR person

Some administrators perceive different goals between the media and education. This perception often translates to distrust and reticence.

Past adversarial relationship with the newspaper

Too many closed sessions

Reluctance or inability to provide information is the main stumbling block.

Reporters' Responses to
How Districts Could Improve Their Relationship with the Press

Better trained administrators on dealings with the press

Be honest and open

Problems stem from inaccessibility and misunderstanding of roles. Administrators don't have to like reporters, but they need to meet with them and discuss individual roles and the need for those roles.

Keep open, honest lines of communications, tell us when we goof--keep "educationese" to a minimum. Keep our function always in mind--

Talk to us, tell us what's happening in the district, especially in the classrooms.

Hire someone with an eye for a good news or feature story--Keep close check with schools for stories and maintain communication with assignment,-i.e. city editor

Be more forthcoming when problems arise; realize the differences of press/education; the necessity of an at times adversarial relationship

Get a public relations person

Tell the truth

Provide complete agendas - (we get the packets immediately before the meeting starts), have a public information officer to coordinate stories, let us know in advance what will happen at various schools, make sure all the facts handing out don't conflict with one another. Need access to more information faster.

Be upfront in face of adversary events as well as positive items

Approach the press with an open mind.

Don't be paranoid

It's probably natural, but there is a tendency sometimes to be less than cooperative on sticky subjects like low test scores or wayward teachers.

Be open and candid

Remember you are a public agency. Get out and learn what the public feels about education and stop relying on surveys.

Hire a superintendent who believes the press has a vital role to play in the mission of the public schools.

Your best bet is to be open and honest with the reporter. Secretiveness and making it difficult for a reporter to get information usually doesn't make the district look any better in the press, but often does exactly the opposite.

Teaching is showing and telling. It is not some barely fathomable discipline that requires a PhD to understand. Make it simple. Make it clean. There's so much B. S. in public education, I'd laugh if it weren't so tragic.

Be honest and forthright. Respect the press and they will respect you.

Administrators should be accessible to reporters. Administrators are the worst. PIO staff is outstanding.

Be open and honest.

These are public schools--records of district business should be available to anyone who asks for them.

Maybe an effort to understand how the press functions and the best way to deal with reporters. Provide access to public information--all public information. Designate one person to funnel information to the press and make sure this person is knowledgeable and can tip the reporter off to good stories.

Negative stories automatically get to the press--but it takes aggressive principals telling the press about features to get good press.

Educators should understand that press is not a p.r. arm of the district. We enjoy writing "good" stories about schools so tell us about your good programs. But our job is to inform the public so that means we may have "negative" stories from time to time, if that's what comes up. To improve your relationship with the press, be realistic about your response to "negative" happenings in your district--be honest and fair and most media will do the same.

Editors' Responses to
How Districts Could Improve Their Working Relationship with the Press

Complete candor is most important. Anytime a reporter is suspicious he or she is not getting the truth, the whole truth, he will be much harder on the district when the story finally emerges. Anyone too slick, too friendly, too pushy hurts the district's aims.

Realize that the public has a right to know; and that administrators should willingly give information, without the attitude that they're doing the reporter (and the public) a favor when they give a straight answer.

Be clear, candid and cooperative

Don't assume reporters know everything about education. Provide background; be willing to sit down and orient a reporter to the subject so he/she can write with some authority and accuracy.

Be open, honest, candid, critical, and run a good district--And not in that order.

Make sure someone is available during all business hours and following meetings to answer reporters questions

Get an aggressive PR man (preferable an ex-reporter) as a PR person

Get people to open up more about the good things as well as the bad. . . They shouldn't be so touchy about bad press.

Be candid, forthright.

The press tends to view most things negatively while educators jump through hoops to stress the positive. Somewhere in the middle is reality. When the shortcomings of both institutions are acknowledged, chances are the relations of reporters and educators can thrive.

Be open--and report the good and bad. Do not view press as their PR tool.

Access to administrators, teachers, and students is the key.

Get to know the people--paper management and reporters. Be open

Be open, easy to reach, honest.

Need an accessible, knowledgeable PIO.

Disseminate more not less information

Allow middle administrators, such as principals, and teachers more latitude in talking directly with the press instead of funneling everything through top administrators.

Fewer closed sessions, return phone calls

Be open and honest

Be open and candid

Both the reporter and the district must earn one another's trust. Districts should have a variety of people available to answer questions. If you don't want to answer the question--say so--don't just refuse to return phone calls to reporters you deal with frequently.

Look at the press as an ally not as an enemy.

We really expect no more than access to records which should be public and an authority to whom we can address questions.

Contact us informally on the phone about story ideas instead of sending so many press releases. Don't be afraid to be candid about problems-- explain them clearly and what you plan to do to correct them.

Be available, be open with reporters, know how local papers work and who to call--including editors.

Be open

Be open, accessible, quick to respond to inquiry, less hostile when coverage displeases or seems to run counter to administrative aims.

Candor is the best policy. Attempts to "puff" features to the press, while avoiding real educational issues, only shed suspicion on the attitudes of administrators and their commitment to quality education.

Openness on both sides generates trust. School officials should be candid and willing to provide information. They also should be quick to correct our mistakes, and we should be more open to their views.

Dec. 19, 1983

This is to respond to your letter of Dec. 9 to me as news editor of the

You will note my asterisk at question 2 and my numerous N/A's -- this is because the _____ is a daily business newspaper, fashioned along the format of the Wall Street Journal. Our orientation is toward business plus the governmental and social news that affect business. Therefore, we do not an education reporter nor do we run school district news as such. (A district construction project would make the _____ whereas school board meetings do not.)

Be that as it may, I have covered school news when I was a reporter in Massachusetts and Connecticut, and I have edited school news stories. In addition, I have had dealings with the _____ Unified School District as a parent. These dealings have been mainly run-ins. Based on this background, you may find the following comments of use -- especially as I note that you are on the inside of a school district as an administrator.

It is apparent that you wish to quantify, as much as possible, the aspects of press-school district relationships. But -- as you know -- there are important variables, such as the relative importance that major daily newspapers attach to school matters. The press in _____, it seems to me, is pretty passive in reporting school news. It will cover weekly school board meetings and fashion stories on this or that state or district report on reading levels, test scores, record of integration. But the press here doesn't do much digging -- it reports what is given. This I attribute not so much to the district's desire to play down the news as to the major newspapers' non-desire to dig into it.

As a newspaperman, I put large school districts in the same category as large businesses and governmental entities -- they are bureaucracies, they have a stated purpose for being and also the purpose to maintain their standing, they wish to increase salaries, and they have no interest in offering news that will prove the board or administrators have ever been in error. (I have also worked a number of years as a public relations person.) Therefore, the "news" that is delivered up to the press is self-serving (if the PIO knows his or her business). Also, as bureaucracies, school districts have over the years insulated the decision-makers from direct dealings with the public. They have taken on PIOs and spokespersons and assistants-to. School boards, as you know, can become captives to their staffs -- the only data they have to work with is that which has been hammered out by, and is acceptable to, staff. And the agendas of school board meetings (as with city councils and county boards of supervisors) can be rigged to put the hot potatoes at the end of a four-hour meeting in the hope and expectation that members of the public will have despaired of ever being heard and thus will have gone home or back to work.

P. 2

Dec. 19, 1983

School districts do do many things that benefit the children in their care. They also do things that work against benefitting children in their care. And they also do things that serve their own internal needs and interests. The job of the press, it seems to me, is to sort these things out and to tell a "straight" story to the reading public. While it is easy for a reporter to accept as a "given" a statement from the superintendent, the president of the school board or a PIO, the reporter should also keep in mind that most of such statements are one-sided and self-serving.

The heart of your study, it seems to me, has less to do with the school district than it does with the self-perceived role of the press. The basic question is whether the reporter wishes to be liked by school/business/governmental powers-that-be, or whether he or she wishes to tell as straight a story as possible. A superintendent, administrator, school board member, PIO knows where his or her bread is buttered. A reporter often does not. A reporter is in the same situation as a good teacher or administrator -- the best ones often get nowhere whereas the ingratiation who are less-competent can prosper.

In summation, I believe the press-school district relationship is an unstable relationship. The district wants to get as good a press as possible whereas the press should wish to tell as straight a story as possible. As the district is always in being (whereas reporters come and go) and is the source of the news that the press seeks to obtain, the district holds the cards. The stance of the press, therefore, should be one of skepticism. But often it is not.

Sincerely yours,

News Editor